Bhutan

TRADITIONS AND CHANGES



EDITED BY

JOHN A. ARDUSSI AND
FRANÇOISE POMMARET

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Cover illustration: view overlooking the capital city of Thimphu, Bhutan, from Chos 'khor rtse monastery. Photo by John A. Ardussi.

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INTRODUCTION

John Ardussi and Françoise Pommaret

If the papers from the Bhutan panel of the 10th seminar of the IATS (Oxford 2003) have one common theme, it is that of traditional culture adapting to change. In the case of Bhutan, the traditional world was not so long ago. It was only in the 1960s that the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, seeing the dramatic Chinese takeover in Tibet, began the process of opening Bhutan to the outside world. Since then, change has occurred at an accelerating pace. In 1960, there were only foot trails, no modern schools, no medical clinics, no communications infrastructure. Today Bhutan is highest among all of the Himalayan states in the UNDP human development index, and is rapidly making up for lost time.

But change has not come without a price. In many ways, Bhutan's noteworthy cultural traditions, though outwardly vibrant, are in a precarious state. The popular, annual Tshechu dance festivals are well supported and thriving, in part due to the attention from overseas tourists. But in spite of generous support from the royal family and nine government five-year plans, many traditional aspects of Bhutanese religion and culture are in decline. This is especially true of the lesser monuments, local traditions, and village cultural practices that are losing their relevance in the modern world. They are dwindling for lack of practitioners and the breakup of the traditional socio-religious network. Links to the past are being severed. In this volume, ten authors have contributed papers that in various ways highlight this trend, in the context of events ranging from the 9th to the 21st centuries. Collectively they make the case for the urgent need to document and study the transformation of Bhutan's culture from traditional to modern.

In pre-modern Bhutan, legal and social disputes were settled by mediation and the application of traditional law. Whitecross examines how the role of traditional specialists called *jabmi* and *barmi* are being supplanted by lawyers trained in modern law, incorporating legal concepts often borrowed from other countries. However Cüppers' paper shows that even in the 18th century, Bhutan's legal code borrowed from outside precedents, namely Tibetan legal codes.

The term Bon in Bhutan is understood as a corpus of non-Buddhist practices, and does not refer to the religious school called Bon. In villages, religious specialists were less likely to be Buddhist monks than they were to be lay practitioners. They included Bon ritualists called Pawo. Tandin Dorji writes about this specialty and how the skills are handed down to successors, either hereditarily or through an external apprenticeship. He shows that the tradition is gradually dying out as young people turn to other careers based in global modernity. Similarly, Ugyen Pelgen examines fading traditional Bon religious practices among the pastoralists of Merak and Sakteng, one of Bhutan's most remote regions in far eastern Bhutan. There, the Pawo and Pamo lead villagers in annual rituals of praise to local mountain deities, in particular to Jomo Remati. The yearly pilgrimage to her abode implies a total lapse of normal social behaviour.

Two papers, those of Choden and Pommaret, focus on grand festivals staged at the manor of a 19th century noble family from central Bhutan, the magnificent estate of Ogyan Choeling in Bumthang. Kunzang Choden, who grew up there with her brother, recalls how special foods were (and still are) prepared and served at these festivals, especially Losar, to honour family, servants and guests. She describes the etiquette presiding over the meals and reflecting the different strata of the society of central Bhutan. Pommaret's paper looks at the broader social-anthropological context of the Kangso festival still held today in autumn, and its function in renewing ties of traditional obligation to neighboring families who played a defined role in the extended affairs of this domain and its owners. She also examines the links between the protective deities of this noble family and the legitimacy of their traditional power. Today, the central tower of the Ogyan Choeling manor houses a private museum and a library that beautifully and authentically document the economic and religious life of Bhutan's nobility during earlier centuries.

Although Bhutan is commonly perceived as a country with one religious school, the Drukpa Kagyupa form of Tibetan Buddhism, in fact, Nyingmapa religious traditions have been established there since the time of Padmasambhava. The papers of Ehrhard and Gayley both examine aspects of Nyingmapa tradition in Bhutan during the 15th–16th centuries. In western Bhutan, Nyingmapa influence was centred at the monastery of Orgyan Tsemo, perched on a cliff above the famous Taktsang monastery in the Paro valley. Ehrhard describes the founding

of this monastery by a Tibetan monk from Kaḥthog monastery in eastern Tibet, who also was an early Nyingmapa pioneer in Sikkim. Gayley writes about the Bhutanese treasure-finder Pema Lingpa, and focuses on the process and challenges of self-legitimisation for such a spiritual practitioner, basing her analysis on Pema Lingpa's bulky 16th century autobiography.

In earlier centuries Bhutan was known poetically as *Lho phyogs sman ljongs*, 'Southern Land of Medicinal Plants'. Even today, the government has an aggressive policy of environmental preservation. Vast reserves of mountain forest are home to dozens of rare plant and animal species, a biological vista that has been destroyed in other parts of the Himalayas. George van Driem devotes his paper to a study of two such Bhutanese plants, species of rhododendron, whose 'virulent exhalations' (i.e. pollen) cause physical symptoms similar to altitude sickness. They were first described in Nepal by 17th century European explorers Johann Grueber and Albert d'Orville, but today seem to only survive in Bhutan.

John Ardussi's paper examines Bhutanese ruins associated by tradition with the exiled 9th century Tibetan prince Lhase Tsangma. Many petty rulers of eastern Bhutan once claimed him as their ancestor, before they were subdued and incorporated into the 17th century state by the forces of the Zhabdrung Rinpoche. By the end of the 17th century their legends were apparently remembered only by an elite few, and now seem to elicit interest principally among historians.

Today the Bhutan government has made the preservation of culture one of its priorities, and efforts are being made to keep the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. It recognises the need to take active steps to record and study its cultural heritage. In recent years we have seen the formation of the National Museum in Paro, the National Library in Thimphu, the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, two Schools for Traditional Arts and Crafts ('Zorig Chusum School')—one in Thimphu and one in Trashi Yangtse in the east—and the Centre for Bhutan Studies, as well as specialised museums devoted to folk culture and weaving. As for the National Commission for Cultural Affairs under the Ministry of Home and Culture, besides coordinating cultural policies, it plays a pivotal role for the conservation and restoration of historical monuments.

A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF BHUTANESE CASTLE RUINS AND CAVES ASSOCIATED WITH LHA SRAS GTSANG MA

John Ardussi

One of the themes of early Tibet important to the history of Bhutan is the story of the exiled prince Lha sras Gtsang ma (Figure 1, Plate 1), eldest of the three sons of emperor Khri Lde srong btsan Sad na legs (reign c. 800–817). He became the legendary progenitor of numerous petty rulers in eastern Bhutan and Tibetan Mon Yul. Since the exploratory investigations on this topic by Michael Aris (Aris 1979: 83–114; Aris 1986) several new Tibetan texts have become available that allow us to extend his results, in particular the histories of Nyang ral, Mkhas pa Lde'u and Ne'u Paṇḍita. During field research in Bhutan in 2002 (with a brief follow-up in June 2005), I was also able to visit several little-known sites connected in Bhutanese sources with Gtsang ma that Michael Aris never visited, including the hilltop castle ruins of Tsenkhar (Tib. Btsan mkhar) in eastern Bhutan. I wish to report here mainly on the preliminary results of this field work, and leave to the future a more detailed examination of the new textual materials.*

Gtsang ma, the Exiled Tibetan Prince

Numerous minor ruling families along the Himalayas once claimed their ancestor to have been an exiled prince from Tibet's royal dynastic period. Some of these royal exiles, such as the fabled Khyi kha ra thod are mentioned mainly in Gter ma literature, i.e. 'revealed' texts from

* The field research for this paper was supported in part by funding from CNRS, Paris. I would like to thank Françoise Pommaret for first bringing to my attention the location of Tsenkhar, and to Ugyen Pelgen, a historian on the staff of Sherubtse College in Kanglung, for offering on-site guidance to these ruins and others nearby at Jamkhar. I am grateful to the Centre for Bhutan Studies and the Royal Bhutan Army, Gunitsawa, for facilitating my field investigation in Paro and along the upper Spa chu river, on the ancient trade route leading to Tibet. All photography is copyrighted by the author, John Ardussi, except where cited.

later centuries. The story of Gtsang ma, however, is found in most of the standard histories. According to Tibetan tradition he was a committed Buddhist, caught up in fraternal conflict over succession to the throne and was exiled to the south by supporters of his younger brother, prince Glang Dar ma, whom later historians held responsible for the anti-Buddhist purge at the end of the Yar lung dynasty.[1] The bare theme of Gtsang ma's religious martyrdom in early sources became grist for the mill of later Tibetan historians who padded the account of his exile to the south in order to build their case against anti-Buddhist elements within the ruling circle. Even his name, Gtsang ma, may have been adjusted to serve this purpose.[2] The normally sober historian Dpa' bo Gtsug lag 'phreng ba, for instance, reproduced in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (1565) part of an old verse chronicle in which Gtsang ma is depicted as a virtual Buddhist martyr. The prince is said to have himself rejected the throne 'like excrement', taking Buddhist ordination instead. As to his exile, we are told that:

> Lha sras Gtsang ma was expelled to Mon Yul. At the point where the monks, scholars, and translators had conducted him to the edge of the Gtsang po river, he said:
>
> All of the king's ministers have consulted on it,
> So I am going to the frontier, powerless to remain.
> What means have I against exile,
> Though I am without blame?
> Oh monks, peaceful in mind, I beg you to turn back!
> My mind is made up; let the boat's lines be cast away!
>
> Saying thus, he went to Kho thing in Lho brag where, it is said, he was poisoned to death, by Sna nam bza' Mang rje.[3]

The 5th Dalai Lama lauds Gtsang ma's commitment to Buddhism even more effusively in his history of Tibet written in 1643, the year after his own enthronement in Lhasa:

> As for the eldest son Gtsang ma, he was enticed by the cotton cloth draped about the fair form of the Mistress of the Heavens [the Milky Way], inveigling him towards the wondrous show at the horizon of

[1] The birth order of the three surviving sons of emperor Khri Lde srong btsan Sad na legs (reign c. 800–817) is presented differently in other sources (for references, see Sørensen 1994: 410 fn, and Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs 1993: 542–43).

[2] In some early MSS, his name is spelled *Rtsang ma* or *Btsan ma*, raising the suspicion that the switch to the form *Gtsang ma* ('The Pure') may be tied to the legend of his Buddhist convictions. Tucci 1947: 314; Aris 1979: 84.

[3] *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Ja: 131a, 134b.

> worldly existence. But he saw it as being impermanent like a banner fluttering in the wind, indeed as the very root cause of a hundred sins! And so instead he allowed himself to be grasped by the highest Thought of Enlightenment and entered into the Jina's precious order.[4]

Clearly, we cannot depend on late rhetoric such as this for accurate history.

Gtsang ma's Date of Birth

Before discussing other elements of Gtsang ma's life story, let us deal with the question of his dates. Until Nyang ral's history became available to scholars, the oldest known accounts of Gtsang ma were the redacted *Sba' bzhed* as edited by Stein (1961) and a brief political history by the Sa skya scholar Grags pa Rgyal mtshan entitled *Bod kyi rgyal rabs* (late 12th–early 13th century), which describes his fate in two separate passages evidently cut and pasted from earlier chronicles:

> (1) Khri Lde srong btsan took the throne. Khri Btsan ma, the eldest of his three sons by queen 'Bro bza' Lha rgyal Gung skar ma, was sent into exile in Lho Bum thang, where he was poisoned to death by [queens] 'Brom bza' Legs rje and Sna nam bza' Me rje the'u.
>
> (2) The eldest of the three [sons] was Gtsang ma (*rtsang ma*), [born] in an Iron Male [Dragon] year. He did not take the ruling power, and was poisoned in Bum thang of Lho brag by 'Bro bza' Legs rje and Sna nam Mang mo rje. But his ruling line still resides there.[5]

Very similar passages are also contained in the much rarer but more recently discovered history written in 1283 by Ne'u / Nel pa Paṇḍita, whose better textual readings enable us to propose the above translation, and to correct the interpretation of earlier scholars:

---

[4] *Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* 69f: *"sras che ba gtsang ma ni / srid pa'i phun tshogs kyi dga' ston mtha' dag lha lam lus phra'i bzhin ras kyi ngos su 'dren byed rlung gi rgyal mtshan 'khyug pa ltar mi brtan zhing / nyes pa brgya phrag bskyed pa'i rtsa bar gzigs te mya ngan las 'das pa'i bsam pa mchog gis zin pa'i sgo nas rgyal ba'i bstan pa rin po che la zhugs".*

[5] See Tucci 1971: 129, 131 for the texts, and Tucci 1947: 310–15 for his earlier translation which differs somewhat from ours. "*Khri lde srong btsan gyis rgyal sa bzung ngo // des 'bro bza' lha rgyal gung skar ma bzhes pa'i sras gsum gyi che ba khri btsan ma // lho bum thang du bcug nas 'brom bza' legs rje dang / sna nam bza' me rje the'us dug gis bkrongs /... // gsum gyi gcen po gtsang ma lcags pho dbyug* [cor. *'brug*] *// rgyal srid ma bzung lho brag bum thang du // 'bro bza' legs rje sna nam mang mo rjes // dug gis bkrongs te de yi srid [b]rgyud bzhugs //* ".

> (1) Khri Lde srong btsan [Sad na legs] took the throne. The eldest of his three sons, Khri Gtsang ma, was exiled to Lho Mon. There he was poisoned to death by [queens] ’Bro bza’ Legs rje pa and Sna nam pa. I have heard it said that his sons’ descendants were the kings of Ya tse.[6]
>
> (2) The eldest of the three [sons] was Gtsang ma [born] in an Iron Male Dragon year [800 AD]. He did not take the ruling power, and died in Bumthang of Lho brag.[7]

Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s history thus contains a critical scribal error, replacing the animal element *’brug* (‘dragon’) by the contextually meaningless word *dbyug* (the two syllables appear similar in cursive Tibetan script in which the *ur*-text might have been written). Aris recognised the difficulty but, unaware of Nel pa Paṇḍita’s work, he tried to construe the word as *spyug* (i.e. *spyugs*) 'banished', which is ungrammatical.[8] More recently Uebach, in her edition of Nel pa Paṇḍita, correctly interpreted the date, but suggested that it referred to Gtsang ma’s death or exile.[9] But this is chronologically impossible if Glang Dar ma (b. 803) was the one also responsible for these events. In fact this Iron Male Dragon year, 800 AD, quite evidently refers to his date of birth, which is thus consistent with the dates of his two younger brothers in the sources that we have followed.

Prince Gtsang ma in Bhutan

Less easy to resolve are the vast differences between the versions of Gtsang ma’s life story in Tibetan and Bhutanese sources. Whereas the former mainly report that he was subsequently assassinated in Lho brag or Bum thang, by supporters of Glang Dar ma, in the traditions of east-

[6] Ya rtse / Ya tshe was identified long ago by Tucci with Seṃjā in western Nepal, whose kings prior to the mid-12th century claimed descent from the famous Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon, of Tibetan royal blood (Tucci 1956: 112ff; Petech 1988: 370ff). The rumor tying Gtsang ma to Ya rtse may have arisen from the fact that, like proto-Bhutan, Ya rtse was also occasionally known to Tibetans as Lho Mon, i.e. a part of the amorphous, primitive southern zone (see the text cited in Petech 1988: 374).

[7] Ne’u Paṇḍita: 7, *“Khri lde srong btsan gyis rgyal sa bzung / de’i sras gsum gyi che ba khri gtsang ma lho mon gyi phyogs su bcugs / ’bro gza’* [*sic. bza’*] *legs rje pa / gnan nam pas dug gi*[*s*] *bkrongs / de’i sras* [*b*]*rgyud ni ya rtse rgyal po yin no shes thos so”*. P. 13: *“Gsum gyi gcen po gtsang ma lcags pho ’brug / rgyal srid ma bzung lho brag bum thang ’das /”*.

[8] Aris 1979: 84–86, 309.

[9] Uebach 1987: 61, 83.

ern Bhutan and Tibetan Mon Yul there was no such assassination. Instead, Gtsang ma came to the south not as a monk but as a royal figure, the ancestor of many noble families that once ruled hereditarily from ridge-top 'kingdoms' and isolated valleys in those regions. However, in the new form we now have it, the Bhutanese story of Gtsang ma was not written down until the late 17th century, eight hundred years after the events in question and a mere decade or so after these chiefs were conquered by the ’Brug pa ecclesiastic authorities from western Bhutan. The author of this historical work known as *Rgyal rigs ’byung khungs gsal ba’i sgron me* (hereafter *Rgyal rigs*) was a monk from eastern Bhutan, perhaps belonging to one of these princely families. His purpose was therefore preservation of aristocratic tradition rather than analytical history.[10] He cited such authoritative Tibetan works as the *Rgyal rabs gsal ba’i me long*, but, as shown earlier by Aris, he omitted those elements that contradicted the Bhutanese portrait of Gtsang ma, including the stories of his exile, his commitment to Buddhism, and the supposed assassination that were central to his Tibetan persona. Comparing the two versions, Tibetan and Bhutanese, it is as if we are discussing two distinct individuals.

Bhutanese Sites in Western Bhutan Connected with Gtsang ma

Many Tibetan accounts agree with Grags pa rgyal mtshan that Gtsang ma went south to Lho brag or ‘Lho brag Bum thang’ where he was assassinated. But most, including the *Sba bzhed*, Nyang ral, Mkhas pa Lde’u and the Bhutanese *Rgyal rigs*, state that he entered Bhutan via Paro valley in the west, either directly or indirectly from Lho brag. This would have entailed passing through Phag ri, in the Chumbi valley of Tibet and crossing Tremola, the main border pass leading to Paro.

Other than the *Sba bzhed*, the earliest Tibetan history tying Gtsang ma to Paro is that of Nyang ral (late 12th century). It presents an unusual account of Gtsang ma’s activities in western Bhutan, describing his

[10] On the motivation for its writing, see *Rgyal rigs* 1: 3–4. See also Aris (1979: 83–146) for a more in-depth appraisal of this work. I have argued elsewhere (Ardussi forthcoming) that the date of the *Rgyal rigs* should be 1668, and not 1728 as concluded by Aris.

travel to a rock cave named *Spyal ka* in which he is said to have hidden religious treasures and various royal documents brought from Tibet, and where he is said to have died and where his mortal remains were then interred.[11] A Bhutanese cave of this same or similar name—Spa gro Phug Bcal ('*spyal*' and '*bcal*' being pronounced the same in Lhasa Tibetan): "Bcal cave in Paro", (numerous spelling variants occur)—also played a central role in the concealment and subsequent rediscovery of many Bon canonical works, allegedly hidden there by a different Tibetan prince, an uncle of Lha sras Gtsang ma.[12] The recovery of an entire collection of Bon texts, called the *Spa gro ma*, is attributed to this site.[13] The sometime confusion in Tibetan sources between the Buddhist prince Gtsang ma and his uncle, a supporter of Bon, both refugees to Mon districts often interpreted as Bhutan, opens up a minor but fascinating vista into early Tibetan history, perhaps telling us more about the ancient sources and how they were treated by later sectarian historians than about factual events. Nevertheless, a relic of Bon po influence on the persona of Gtsang ma still lingers in recent Bhutanese writings.[14]

There are, thus, several important historical ties in Tibetan literature to the cave in Paro known as Bcal or Spyal [-ka]. Its identification has long been a desideratum. During 2002, I visited four previously undescribed sites connected in historical sources with Lha sras Gtsang ma, two in the Paro valley and two near Trashigang in eastern Bhutan. My

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[11] *Chos 'byung me tog snying po*: 436–37. "*De nas lha sras gtsang ma lho brag 'kho mthing du byon / zhig ral thams cad gsos / gter tshan gcig sbas / de nas spa gror byon / skyer chu'i lha khang rnying pa gsos / gsar pa brtsigs / yab mes kyi bla dpe dang / khrims kyi yig tshang dang tshan che ba gcig sbas / stag tshang dang seng ge phug tu gter kha mang du sbas / spyal kar brgya rtsa brgyad sbas / gter phran mang du sbas / de nas lha sras gtsang ma la spyan 'dren med pas thugs mug ste / bsam yas skyer tshang gi bla dpe zab mo rnams spyan drangs te spyal ka'i brag la sbas / lha sras nyid der grongs te / spur yang bse sgrom du bcug nas brag la sbas /*".

[12] The Bon texts discovered at this cave by Khu tsha Zla 'od and others are indexed with brief colophons in Karmay & Nagano 2001: 311. Karmay 1972: 145ff describes their discovery. Kong sprul's Gter ston brgya rtsa and the Lho'i chos 'byung 2: 69a–b mention other 11th century Bonpo *gter ston* active at this cave.

[13] Karmay 1972: 145–48.

[14] A small history booklet published in Dzongkha in 1969 [revised ed. 1974] with the title History of Deb Rajas of Bhutan, curiously attributes Gtsang ma's expulsion from Tibet to his commitment to Bon, not to Buddhism (pp. 9–10). This has been revised in more recent Ministry of Education textbooks. Lopen Pema's recent history of Bhutan, on the other hand, follows closely the account in the *Rgyal rigs* (*'Brug gyi rgyal rabs*: 47–48).

small party spent a week during 2002 exploring first in the upper Paro valley looking for a cave with the name Spyal ka or Phug Bcal. Members of the Royal Bhutan Army guided us up the ancient trade route (Plate 2) to Tremola. We located two rock caves below rampart cliffs in the upper Spa chu river basin (Plates 3, 4), within about two miles of the Tibetan border, whose ambience seemed to capture a sense of the description of Spa gro Phug Bcal given in Bon sources, "[a rock formation] shaped like the gaping mouth of a white lioness with a waistband as though from the uniform of Mongol militiamen".[15] But this name seems not to be remembered by modern Bhutanese who, I learned, do not treat these two caves as sacred sites or sites of historical significance.

Another early literary description of a site having the name Spyal [-ka] is the rare biography of the Tibetan monk Rgyal ba Lha nang pa (1164–1224) written by his disciple Che mchog rdo rje.[16] Rgyal ba Lha nang pa is said to have founded a monastery there, ca. AD 1207 , known as Spa gro Gcal ka or Bcas ka. He resided there for about twelve years, before returning to Tibet. It became the principal Bhutanese *gdan sa* of his successors, a branch of the 'Bri gung pa sect known as Lha pa. They became the chief adversaries of the 'Brug pa monks in western Bhutan, and Bcas kha was burnt down during a 14th century sectarian struggle.[17] The site is described by Che mchog rdo rje as a cave or rock formation in Paro, having the full name *Spyal gyi brag dkar 'dzum pa*, the "smiling white rock (cave) of Spyal", a holy site where formerly Padmasambhava had meditated. This description faintly echoes the Bon sources cited above by Tenzin Namdak and Samten Karmay. However, it also calls to mind the old Rnying ma pa cliff-side monasteries named Brag dkar po and Rdzong brag kha, located in side valleys of Paro at a much lower and more hospitable elevation than the upper Spa chu basin. Work continues on this part of my investigation.

We had more positive luck with a second site in western Bhutan, a cave named Nam mthong dkar po in the *Rgyal rigs* (spelled Gnam

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15 *Snga rabs bod kyi byung ba brjod pa*: 128, citing a historical commentary called *Rnam 'byed 'phrul lde*. This account draws upon a much older Bon po source which I have not seen called the *Bsgrags byang*, a quasi-historical work on Bon po treasure literature dating from the 12th century or before (for this date see Dan Martin 1997, entry no. 13).

16 *Rgyal ba Lha nang pa*: 98f.

17 *Kha rag gnyos*: 16b.

mthong or Nam thang dkar po in other sources). It is found not far from Paro Rinpung Dzong in Hungral Gewog.[18] According to the *Rgyal rigs*, Lha sras Gtsang ma came from Lhasa to Paro on an inspection tour, along with five companions. He was sent by his brother, the emperor Ral pa can, to investigate the communities and welfare of his subjects living in Lho Mon.[19] At Nam mthong dkar po he supposedly formed a brief liaison with a beautiful girl, who later bore him a son.[20] Today, the name Nam mthong dkar po[21] is attached to a small rock meditation cave (Plate 5) located along an exposed ridgeline near an imposing, historical manor of recent centuries named Zur ri lha khang (Plate 6), a short distance south and above Paro Rinpung fortress and hidden behind a ring of trees. Could Zur ri lha khang be a more recent structure now on the site where the *Rgyal rigs*'s 17th century aristocratic family claiming descent from Gtsang ma once lived? This was my initial hypothesis. No written sources known to me describe anything about the history of this imposing building, with its vast decaying stone staircase leading down the mountain.

Yet Spa gro Nam mthong/thang dkar po is a site that has been associated with the discovery of *gter ma* literature since the time of the *Padma thang yig* (1352), and is thus important in Tibetan history as well.[22] Searching for this place, my focus shifted to a site several hundred yards below the ridgeline cave, to an old temple known today as Nangkar Lhakhang (Snang dkar lha khang) or Namkar Lhakhang, quite possibly an abbreviated or corrupted version of the name Nam mthong dkar po. Today, the temple is connected by local people not to Lha sras

[18] Aris's statement that the place is located in "upper Paro" is incorrect (1986:78).

[19] *Rgyal rigs*: 21, *"Rgyal po'i zhal nas / gcung [sic.] gtsang ma rang da lo nged rang rnams kyi sku chags bsangs pa dang / lho mon gyi mnga' 'bangs mi sde rnams kyi yul khams ji ltar yod dang bde sdug ci 'dra yod gzigs pa la phebs pas chog zer ba bzhin lho spa gro phyogs la 'phebs pa.../"*.

[20] *Rgyal rigs*: 25–27.

[21] The meaning of the name was given to me by a nearby caretaker at Zur ri lha khang, as "the cave from within which the sky can be seen". As with so many such Bhutanese interpretations, this one may be quite modern. *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*: 371 provides a different etymology of the name in its Tibetan variant Gnam thang dkar po, as a gloss on the prediction in the *Padma thang yig* of a site with this name "where Mongol warriors from India would be defeated" and where the Bon priest named Bon po Drag rtsal would recover various texts (see the following fn.).

[22] Padma thang yig: 195.b,197.a–b.: "*Spa gro gnam thang dkar po sog dmag 'joms / las su dme 'khrug byed cing lcags cha gyon / bum thang rtsi lung sbas pa'i gter ka 'di / mi bzhag 'don pa'i rtags der bstan nas byung /*".

Gtsang ma, but to the exploits of the famous 13th century ’Brug pa pioneer Pha jo ’Brug sgom zhig po. More significantly, it is the site of a unique annual ritual performance known as the Snang dkar Bzlog, which, exhibiting a complex scenario poorly understood even by local people, re-enacts a battle of victory over invading Tibetan armies.[23] This is an important clue, in my opinion, the modern relic of an ancient myth, that may allow us to tie this site to the obscure verse in the *Padma thang yig* (f. 195.b, 197.a–b) prophesying the discovery of concealed treasure texts and “the defeat of the Sog (i.e. Mongol) armies at Spa gro gnam thang dkar po”. In short, my working hypothesis is that the cave and temple described here are the sites relating to the story of Gtsang ma’s activities in the Paro valley presented in the 17th century *Rgyal rigs*, and further back in history to the obscure passage cited above from the *Padma thang yig* (f. 195.b, 197.a–b) prophesying the discovery of concealed treasure texts and “the defeat of the Sog (i.e. Mongol) armies at Spa gro Gnam thang dkar po”.

Lha sras Gtsang ma’s Descendants in the East

Lha sras Gtsang ma’s party left western Bhutan after a short stay, according to the *Rgyal rigs,* and made their way eastward as far as the bastion of Dpal mkhar in the district of La ’og Yul gsum near Tawang, east of modern Bhutan. Finding those lands disturbed by the troubles in Tibet, they returned to the site of what is now Trashigang, the administrative centre of eastern Bhutan since the 17th century. The story went that there was a householder living near a place called Mi zim pa, named A mi Don grub rgyal. He described himself to Gtsang ma as a Tibetan of the Rlangs Lha gzigs lineage descended from A mi Byang chub ’dre bkol (968–1076), who had fled his family’s estates in the Byar district of southeastern Tibet after losing a power struggle within the family.[24] The author of the *Rgyal rigs* comments here that the Rlangs family in question “is the same as today’s Phag mo gru pa, which is to say, the lineage of the Ne’u gdong Gong ma chen mo”. In other words,

23 Needrup Zangpo, “Nang dkar dok (sNang dkar bzlog)”. In *Preservation and Continuity of Bhutanese Culture*. National Museum of Paro [unpublished conference paper].

24 *Rgyal rigs*: 26f.

A mi Don grub rgyal was related to the most powerful ruling family of central Tibet during the late 14th and early 15th centuries. But neither of these historical snippets concerning the Tibetan Rlangs clan fit with the chronology of Gtsang ma and, as Aris surmised, look like interpolations added to the story long before the *Rgyal rigs* was written.[25] Such an interpolation would probably not have occurred after 1435, when the Phag mo gru pa rulers of Sne'u gdong lost their supremacy in central Tibet and no doubt also lost whatever nominal authority they may have asserted over frontier lands such as Lho Mon.[26]

Gtsang ma married the daughter of A mi Don grub rgyal, founded a castle, and had two sons by this marriage named Khri mi Lha'i dbang phyug and Gces bu Mthong legs btsun, who themselves grew up to become rulers of the Mi zim pa castle and estates. In time, the fame of their line called 'Lineage of the Tibetan Dharmarāja' (*bod chos rgyal gyi gdung*) reached other valleys, and Khri mi Lha'i dbang phyug was invited to become hereditary chief of the people of La 'og Yul gsum near Tawang. So he left Mi zim pa forever and his lineage, now in Arunachal Pradesh, came to be called the Khams pa Jo bo. Gces bu Mthong legs btsun remained at Mi zim pa, married, and had three sons. One of them, Khri brtan dpal, kept the line at Mi zim pa while his twin brothers Gong dkar rgyal and Dpal bsked dar were invited to establish ruling castles in other districts. There they became 'lord chiefs' (*rje dpon*) among the common people who welcomed the royal prestige and political tranquility that these lords conferred.[27]

The presence of local rulers having distinctive clan names and pedigrees going back to Tibetan royalty was thus at one time an important attribute of the socio-political landscape of eastern Bhutan and Tibetan Mon Yul, as discussed previously by Michael Aris (Aris 1979, 1986). Chapter two of the *Rgyal rigs* outlines more than twenty lines of local rulers that derived from the early descendants of Gtsang ma. Branches of this nobility were to be found in dramatic ridge-top settlements such

[25] Aris 1986: 79.

[26] Shakabpa, *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*. Vol. 1: 345. The history of the Tibetan Rlangs clan of Phag mo gru describes a semi-mythical conquest of Mon Kha bzhi (possibly meaning Lho mon kha bzhi, an old name for Bhutan) by the clan hero Rlangs Sengge 'Dul, the date of which is difficult to assign (*Rlangs po ti bse ru*: 33). Other Tibetan sources also occasionally imply that the Phag mo gru rulers once asserted their authority over parts of central Bhutan.

[27] *Rgyal rigs*: 15b, 23a–b, etc.

as Udzarong (U dza rong) and Chaskar (Skya sa mkhar) along the She ri, Grang ma'i and Gom ri rivers, in Trashiyangtse and in Trashigang, as well as further south in Zhemgang and Dungsam. Yet so remote were they from the main centres of Tibetan culture that these princes go almost entirely unnoticed in Tibetan studies of the lineage fragments from the former Yarlung dynasty.

The Ruins of Byams mkhar and Btsan mkhar

In 2002 I briefly inspected two ruins in eastern Bhutan that are connected today with the traditions of Lha sras Gtsang ma. Several other ancient sites in the general area were also brought to my attention, and all still await formal archaeological investigation.[28]

The first site visited by my party was identified as Jamkhar, which I take to be identical with the place called Byams mkhar or 'Jam mkhar in the *Rgyal rigs*.[29] It is located on a low ridge west of the roadway about three miles north of Trashigang and south of the modern hillside village called Jamkhar. The ruins on the site today consist of low, crumbling stone walls and foundations that stylistically appear to date from different periods. Intermingled among them are agricultural plots and irrigation channels. The ruins at Byams mkhar resemble more an abandoned village than a castle site. Alongside the pathway through the site are found old *mchod rten* structures, recently vandalised, and a small prayer wall (Plates 7, 8). Such structures are commonly found along the hillside trails in this part of Bhutan but none have so far been dated.

A much more important castle site is the ruined bastion known as Btsan mkhar or Btsan mkhar la, 'the fortress of the king', located on a high ridge above the Kho long river, about ten miles northwest of Trashigang (Plates 9, 10). This ruin is situated in a clearly defensive location, and could well be the Mi zim pa of history and legend, as local traditions hold it to be. The *Rgyal rigs* states that Gtsang ma, on his return from La 'og yul gsum and after leaving Byams mkhar, "went to Btsan mkhar of 'Brog mdo gsum. Looking about for a place suitable to take as a royal castle (*rgyal mkhar*) he saw that the place called Mi zim

[28] Ugyel Pelgen & Tandin Dorji 1997 report very briefly on these castle sites. See also Ugyen Pelgen & Tshering Gyeltshen 2004.

[29] *Rgyal rigs*: 12b.

pa was surrounded by water, that the valley was rich and the site elevated".[30] So he went there, took a wife, and built his castle.

Other than the *Rgyal rigs* this bastion or castle is referred to in only a single historical source known to me, namely the biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama, whose mother's family claimed descent from the exiled Tibetan prince who built it. In that text written by the famous Tibetan Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), however, it was not Lha sras Gtsang ma but rather his uncle, the legendary dog-faced 'prince' named Khyi kha ra thod who built the castle that this author calls Mi zim mkhar, which is to say an abbreviation for Mi zim pa'i btsan mkhar.[31]

'Brog mdo gsum is a small village known today as Doksum, along the river far below the ridge on which the ruined Btsan mkhar is located. It hosts the only iron chain link bridge still in use in Bhutan and which is attributed to the Tibetan saint Thang stong rgyal po (1385–1464), who traveled throughout Bhutan and built numerous iron bridges there during the years 1432–1437. The saint's visit to eastern Bhutan, although not specifically described in his biography, is hinted at in its summary and was remembered by the chiefs near Tawang who were descendants of Gtsang ma, as reported in the *Rgyal rigs*.[32] Ancient bridge works and the remains of watch towers on the river crossing below Trashigang are also attributed to him in local tradition.

The ruins of Btsan mkhar lie strategically along a high ridge overlooking three valleys, including that of the main river flowing out of Tawang, which at the time was a frontier area of Tibet. The structure that we see today consists of a substantial surrounding wall with two inset windows. It is constructed of stone and supporting beams, from which we collected a small sample for dating, using C14 methods. The results place the date when the sampled wooden portion of this building was harvested to the period 1420–1435 (with 1-sigma or 68% probability) or 1305–1460 (with 2-sigma or 95% probability).[33]

Thus, the exposed ruins at Btsan mkhar are not contemporaneous with Lha sras Gtsang ma. But the C14 date falls exactly within the peri-

[30] *ibid.*: 13a.

[31] *Dalai Lama VI*: 149.

[32] *Thang stong rgyal po*: 82a–83b; *Rgyal rigs*: 29b; Sarkar 1980: 4–5. In the Sixth Dalai Lama's biography, the descendant of Gtsang ma from the lineage of Khams pa Jo bo of Tawang, named Jo bo Dar rgyas, is said to have met this saint and recorded a miracle performed by him (*Dalai Lama VI*: 150).

[33] C14 analysis was performed at Beta Analytic Inc., Miami, Florida.

od of Thang stong rgyal po's visit to Bhutan, during the apex of political power and geographic reach of the Phag mo gru hierarchs of Tibet. In fact, the year 1435 marks the year that began their rapid decline and the rise of their rivals, the princes of Rin spungs. We recall in this context the comment in the Rgyal rigs about the family of Lha sras Gtsang ma's wife, a branch of the Rlangs family of Phag mo gru that left Tibet following a fratricidal dispute. The most famous such family rupture occurred in 1434, referred to by Tibetan historians as "the great civil strife of the Tiger Year", also called "the year when Phag mo gru was destroyed from within".[34]

All of these facts together would seem to argue that the bastion of Btsan mkhar or Mi zim pa as we now know it is a ruin from the period 1425–40,[35] and does not belong to the time of Lha sras Gtsang ma. It is certainly possible that it was constructed in the near aftermath of the Rlangs family breakup of 1434 that precipitated the collapse of Phag mo gru supremacy in Tibet, by a family branch that lost power and took refuge in Bhutan. If so, this would be yet another story of how, like the Zhabdrung Rinpoche two hundred years later, Bhutan served as a place of refuge for a prominent Tibetan on the losing side of a political dispute. The conflation of local traditions about 9th century castles belonging to Lha sras Gtsang ma with those of mid 15th century princes is not terribly surprising in the context of eastern Bhutan, where most history passed down through oral transmission alone. Only a single known source from that era hints at the existence of written records concerning the Bhutanese Gtsang ma.[36]

These conclusions, of course, do not rule out the possibility that an older, 9th century bastion may still lie beneath the ruins of Btsan mkhar, awaiting future archaeological discovery.

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34 Shakabpa (1976) vol. 1: 344–45. *'di la stag lo'i 1434 sde gzar chen mo 'am / phag gru nang zhig gi lo yang zer*.

35 The C14 dates refer to the year when the wood stopped growing, i.e. was cut down. We may suppose that the construction took place within five years or so of these dates.

36 The 15th-century *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu* by Don dam Smra ba'i seng ge is the only source corroborating bits of the Bhutanese Gtsang ma tradition and the existence of early written records. It was written by an author from a Tibetan Mon district near eastern Bhutan, possibly himself a descendant of Gtsang ma (Smith 1969: 8). It states that "the kings of Lho Mon are the descendants of Lord Gtsang ma", and that the details were to be found in their written records (*Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 105.b: *lho phyogs mon gyi rgyal po rnams / mnga' bdag rtsang* [*sic.*] *ma'i gdung rgyud yin / 'on kyang rang gi yig tshang gzings /*).

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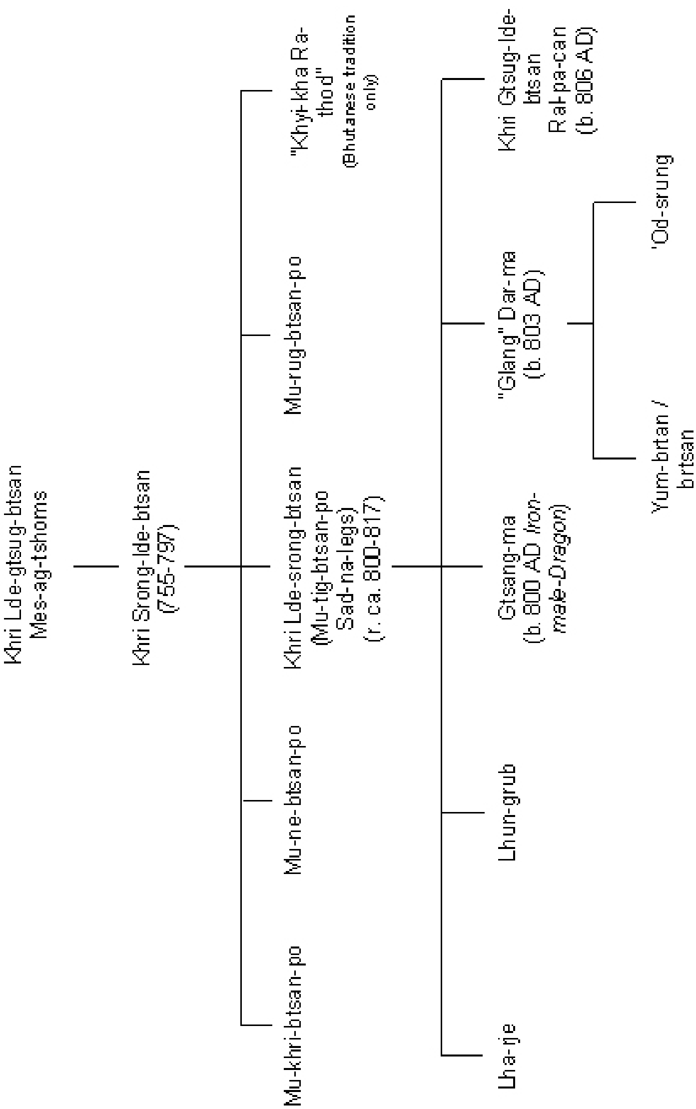


Figure 1: Later generations of the Yar lung Dynasty

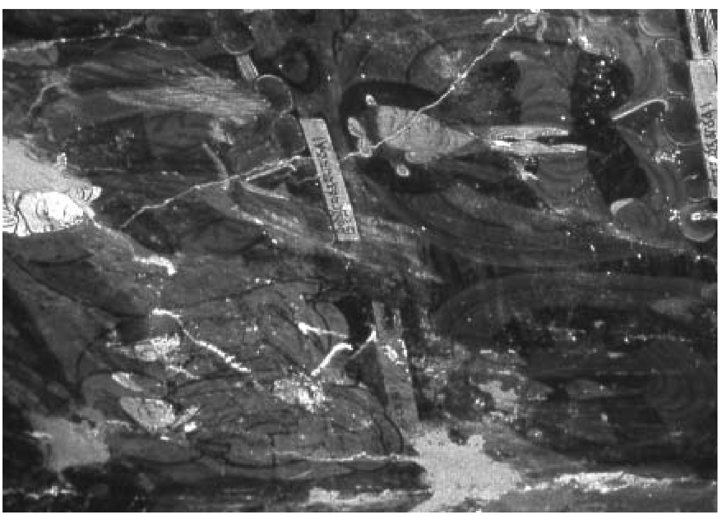


Plate 1: Portrait of Gtsang ma (Upper Left) from the Great Kumbum of Gyantse, together with his brothers, Emperor Ral pa can, 'U dum btsan Dar ma, and Rdo rje lhun grub (photograph courtesy of Samten Karmay)



Plate 2: The traditional trade route from Paro to Tibet, up the Spa chu Basin to Tremola (alt. c. 11,000 ft)



Plate 3: Rampart cliffs along the Upper Spa chu



Figure 4: Rock Cave along the Upper Spa chu River, Paro, Bhutan



Plate 5: Entrance to Gnam mthong dkar po Cave, Paro, Bhutan



Plate 6: Zur ri Lha khang, Paro, Bhutan



Plate 7: Ruins of Byams mkhar, Trashigang Dzongkhag, Eastern Bhutan



Plate 8: Old mani wall among the ruins at Byams mkhar, near Trashigang, Eastern Bhutan



Plate 9: 15th century ruins of Btsan mkhar castle above Doksum ('Brog mdo gsum), near Trashigang, Eastern Bhutan



Plate 10: Ruins of Btsan mkhar, with nearby prayer wall

LO GSAR CELEBRATION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD IN THE NOBLE AND RELIGIOUS FAMILY OF O RGYAN CHOS GLING (CENTRAL BHUTAN)

KUNZANG CHODEN

Bhutanese New Year or Losar (*Lo gsar*),[1] according to the lunar calendar, falls sometime in February-March and it is by far the single most important semi-religious festival for the entire country. For my family, Losar did not merely consist of feasting and the revelry but it was the celebration of time-honoured family tradition, which entailed a certain set of observances to be carried out meticulously. My parents upheld their duties as the lama choeje (*bla ma chos rje*)[2] of Ogyen Choling (O rgyan chos gling), and they aspired, like the generations before them, to make Losar as grand as the previous ones, if not better.

The village of Ogyen Choling is located in the upper part of Tang (Stang) valley in the Bumthang district in the central part of Bhutan. My ancestral home is a relatively large complex built in the style and the scale of a dzong (*rdzong*) or a palace/ fortress. Although it was sometimes referred to as a dzong, it was more often known as a gompa (*dgon pa*) or a monastery because of its origin and history. My father's ancestors traced their religious lineage to the 14th century Tibetan master Longchen Rabjam[3] (1308–63) and their genealogical lineage to the

1 To make the main text easier to read, I have chosen to use transcription of Tibetan/Dzongka names and terms. However, the transliteration of each of these words is given in brackets at its first occurrence. Dz. means Dzongkha. In the notes, only transliteration is given. Note: for terms that are in the Bumthangkha language or for which I do not know the transliteration, I use the transcription followed by an asterix. All photos are by Walter Roder.

2 *Bla ma chos rje*: From the 9th century onwards in western and central Bhutan, the descendants of well known and respected religious personalities constituted a religious nobility known as *chos rje*. In the case of O rgyan chos gling the term *bla ma* was added suggesting that members of the household at various times in history also functioned as religious masters.

3 Kun mkhyen Klong chen rab 'byams was the most celebrated writer and accomplished master of the Rnying ma pa school of Buddhism. He sought refuge in Bhutan for 10 years after a misunderstanding with Byang chub rgyal mtshan who became the ruler of Tibet in 1349. He founded eight religious centres in Bhutan known as the 'Eight *gling*' and O rgyan chos gling is included as one of them.

saint and tantric treasure-discoverer Dorji Lingpa (1365–1405) (Plate 1).[4] Throughout history, my father's ancestors seem to have wielded considerable power and influence in the region. Even as late as the mid-1950s, my parents considered the celebration of Losar to be a fulfillment of their duty. They saw it as a matter of their prestige and pride to ensure that this duty was carried out to the best of their ability.

My mother, an uncle, and one or two trusted senior servants worked in our private altar room and the fairly large adjoining room, carefully piling all sorts of eatables on to plates. These special occasion plates, called 'thokay' (*mtho bkal*) were made of silver, brass, copper or even wood. They had a round base which rose up elegantly in an elongated cylindrical extension to form a shallow plate. It was a challenging, artistic, and loving endeavour to balance all the food items on top of each other to heights of about 30cm off the plate (Plate 3). The end result was a conical structure of food that looked like a free-floating lotus bud. The mandarins were placed on top of each other in the centre, they made up the central piece. The golden sugar cane, cut into about 20cm lengths were positioned symmetrically around the plate as were the bananas which were still green and not edible, but it was the auspiciousness of the variety that mattered. All sorts of intricately crafted and fried biscuits (*tshos*) were then arranged carefully within the skeletal fruit framework (Plate 6). Every kind of fruit, dried and fresh, nuts, candies and biscuits were added to the structure in an intricate and delicate balance.

The size and the elaborateness of each plate was different, indicating the status of each recipient. Father, as the patriarch and the genealogical lineage holder (*gdung brgyud*), upholder of the religious tradition (*chos brgyud*),[5] and the ruling feudal lord of the region was served the biggest and the most elaborate plate. If there was a high lama or a special guest, he too would receive an equally big and elaborate plate. My older brother, the logical heir of the lineage and my mother, mistress of the house, were served the second largest ones. The other

[4] Rdo rje gling pa is one of the most pre-eminent religious figures in the *Rnying ma pa* tradition and one of the 'five great *gter ston*' or religious treasure revealers. The O rgyan chos gling *gdung brgyud* is traced to Rdo rje gling pa whose reincarnation or son (this is not clear), Sprul sku Mchog ldan mgon po, is held to be the originator of the lineage.

[5] *Chos brgyud*: O rgyan chos gling has tried to maintain the religious tradition of Rdo rje gling pa. Even today the ritual of *bla ma bka' 'dus* is performed during the annual prayers in the 9th month of the lunar calendar. Cf. Pommaret's paper in this volume.

children and the rest of the relatives were given equally-sized plates while the other invitees were offered plates according to their status and position. The plates were finally lined up against the wall, given one last critical scrutiny and the final touches were made, a biscuit was adjusted here, a nut tapped into position there and these handiworks were not to touched until the early hours of the next morning when they would be served to each individual at the Shudrel Phuensum Tshogpa (*bzhugs gral phun sum tshogs pa*) ceremony. By observing this ceremony our family was following a three-hundred-year-old tradition.

This ceremony, performed all over Bhutan, originated in 1637. When the construction of Punakha dzong was completed, the great Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594–1651), the unifier of Bhutan, conducted an inaugural ceremony. People from all over the country came for the celebration bringing with them the produce from their regions:

> Rice and other cereals as well as different varieties of fruits and vegetables came from the nearby valleys of Shar (Shar), Wang (Wang) and Paro (Spa gro). Woven fabrics and other products came from the eastern regions of Kurtoe (Skur stod), Mongar (Mon sgar), Trashi Yangtse (Bkra shis yang rtse) and Trashigang (Bkra shis sgang). Pastoral people from Haa (Ha), Lingshi (Gling bzhi), Laya (La yag), Lunana (Lung nag nang), Bumthang (Bum thang) and Merak Sakteng (Me rag Sag gteng) brought cheese, butter and other animal products while those from Mangde (Mang sde) and Darkar (Dar dkar) brought walnut and other fruits. Doma and pani (areca nut and betel leaves) came from Dungsum (Gdung bsam) and the Duar region while sugar cane and molasses came from Wamrong (Wam rong) and Kheng (Kheng) regions.[6]

The Shabdrung considered this gesture of people coming from all over the country with their regional produce (Plate 2) as highly auspicious and asked the people to be seated in rows and every food item was served to all. This momentous event, known as Shudrel Phuensum Tshogpa, which literally means ‘coming together and seating in rows for all good things’ has become a standard ceremony for important occasions like the new year, weddings and house inaugurations. This ceremony instituted over three hundred years ago was observed in painstaking splendour for the new year in Ogyen Choling in 1959.

At about the same time as the thokay were being appraised for the final time, the servants in the adjoining room would call my mother to

[6] *History of Bhutan* (1994) and *Driglam Namzhag* (1999: 153–54).

show her what they had been doing. There were various baskets with different eatables (preferably twenty-one items) in rows, ready to be handed out to the other invitees the next morning. It was the tradition that one member from each household from all the villages in the Tang valley was to be served Losar in Ogyen Choling. More than being simply a gesture of *noblesse oblige*, it was time for sharing the auspiciousness of the new year, renewing loyalties and fostering goodwill. There would be about 180–200 people altogether,[7] which included the family members and relatives, special guests, the servants, weavers, cooks, the servers, the water carriers, cow herders, yak herders, those who fed the pigs, those who carried the firewood, and all sorts of people whose services were required to make the feudal system viable. So, while my parents and their ancestors before them had meticulously planned and precisely arranged the celebration of new year, for those who would partake of the feast it was the age-old tradition of 'eating Losar' that had brought them to assemble on the cold stone slabs in the courtyard of our home.

Preparations for the grand event were not confined to the eve of Losar. Over the entire year goods were collected and set aside for the big occasion. Vegetables, mainly radish and turnip, were preserved in buckwheat straw and husks. Others had been shredded or cut and sun-dried. Pears from two particular trees which had been harvested in November, only after it had a good dose of frost, were preserved in earthen jars and kept fresh for the Losar. Peaches and pears were sun-dried and stored. As early as the 7th month of the Bhutanese calendar, our family's merchants would go to the seven-day annual trade fair at Talung Tshongdu (Lho Rta lung tshong 'dus), close to the lake Yamdrok (Yar 'brog) in Tibet. Fine brick tea, rock salt, borax, and sheep pelts were imported and set aside for Losar. The sheep pelts were an important food item in the old days. The wool was removed from the pelts and processed into thread. The hides could be made into different recipes and eaten as delicacies. Whole legs of mutton, wind-dried and preserved in the frigid Tibetan temperatures, had been traded against

[7] Prior to the emancipation of serfs by king Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928–1972), feudal households such as O rgyan chos gling were maintained by the employment of serfs 'zap' (*bza' pa*) and 'drap' (*grwa pa*).The former worked for their masters on a daily basis and were given food and clothing. They owned no land of their own. The latter were tenant farmers. They also worked on a daily basis but were given land for their labours. On New Year one member of each household plus all the individuals who performed specific services were invited to the feast.

rice, chilli, brown sugar, madder, hand woven fabrics and handmade Bhutanese paper. These goods were fastidiously carried over the high ice and snowbound passes, a journey of several days into the Tibetan trading centres. Although some rice was taken as far as Lhasa to be exchanged for special items, most of the rice was actually exchanged at Tsampa (Mtshams pa), a small settlement at the northernmost part of the Choekhor (Chos 'khor) valley of Bumthang. The merchandise from Tibet was carried back to Ogyen Choling by porters, mules and yaks. Candies and biscuits from India—the nearest border towns were Khorasar in West Bengal and Godama in Assam—added variety to the displays. Weeks before Losar, the family's yaks and pack mules had carried many measures of rice, pulses and cereals from our estates in sub-tropical Kurtoe, east of Bumthang in today's Lhuentse (Lhun rtse) district. Depending upon the harvest from year to year, as many as twenty or as few as five to six porters would be required to carry the more fragile and perishable goods like fruits and vegetables on their backs and trek through treacherous terrain for two to three days to reach Ogyen Choling.

When all the preparations for the new year were complete, the small wooden box with the special cups and bowls would be brought out and father would unwrap the fine Chinese porcelain bowls from their covers of silk and brocade. There were some jade bowls too, white and green ones. The rest were ivory and wooden bowls. The finely turned and delicately lacquered wooden bowls were highly valued for they were made of the coveted but rare tree carbuncles called 'dza' (Dz. *rdza*). Some of these bowls were lined with silver and gilded. Some of them looked fairly new because of their occasional, restricted use, helping to maintain their newness. Others were old and worn out with the lacquer nearly worn off. These cups and bowls were seldom used, and only on special occasions. For the rest of the time they were locked away. The auspicious occasion of Losar called for the use of these utensils for they were not only precious in value but loaded with sentiment. These cups and bowls were used by many generations. Our parents knew each bowl and its history. The large worn out one belonged to our famous ancestor, Kusho Tsokey Dorji,[8] Governor of Trongsa (in the

[8] Sku zhabs Mtsho skyes rdo rje, also known as Dbang chen rdo rje, was the fifteenth descendant of Rdo rje gling pa and he played a significant role in the political history of Bhutan. He handed over his post of Krong sar *Dpon slob* to 'Jigs med Rnam

first half of the 19th century). These bowls and cups formed a tangible link to our ancestors and by using them on this special occasion, we not only invoked their memory but we would be sharing some of the merits of our ancestors.

It was customary and highly desirable for each individual to put on a new set of clothes on Losar. For many this was the only time when they actually got a new set of clothes. All the retainers were given an annual set of clothes (*lo gos*) at this time. Mother made sure that all the children also got a new set of clothes for the new year.

We looked eagerly to the eastern mountain for the position of the sun as an indicator of time. As the peak of the eastern mountain of Kanyai* glowed with the light of the rising sun we would be sitting in a big semi-circle with father at the head. Fortunately, this room was one of the few rooms in the house that had glass window panes, and was not too cold. But there was always an atmosphere of restraint and formality as we sat in our places and waited for the ceremonies to begin. Formal meals were normally eaten in silence. The altar was decked up with all sorts of ritual offerings; it was so full and laden that an extra long narrow table was placed in front of it to accommodate all the other offerings that were yet to come. The ritual cakes (*gtor ma*) coated with a layer of butter and red colour gleamed in the light of the butter lamp. The ceremony would unfold when father ceremoniously rose from his seat, walked to the altar and took up the porcelain bowl in which holy relics had been soaking over night. He would spoon out a precious drop in the centre of our cupped palms which we licked off reverently.

Each person had to have various bowls to receive all the varieties of food that would be served. The first item of the day was ‘shaythu’ (Dz. *Phye thug*), a rice gruel cooked to a fine pouring consistency. Rice was cooked already the night before until it became soft. The next morning the seasonings were added: salt, butter, some ginger, a dash of chili powder, dried cheese (fresh cheese mashed and squeezed into thin noodle-like strands and sun-dried) and a dash of finely ground Sichuan peppers (*Xanthoxyllum*). ‘Changkoi’ (Dz. *chang ’khol*), a thick soup of fermented rice prepared with butter; eggs and seeds of amaranths followed the rice soup. This slightly alcoholic soup warmed us on the

rgyal (1825–1865), the father of O rgyan dbang phyug (1862–1926) who became the first king of Bhutan in 1907. The title *Sku zhabs* is rarely used in Bhutan where it is pronounced ‘Kusho’, but in our family we always added this title to Mtsho skyes rdo rje’s name.

shivery February-March early mornings and we were ready to sit for another hour or two until the end of the ceremonies.

As the sun glided past the mountain top, promising a warm day, the elaborately ornate silver tea pot would appear from behind the screen protecting the door, balanced on the raised left palm of the tea server. The freshly polished silver caught the first rays of the sun and gleamed and sparkled. There was much ritual in the way the tea was served. The retainer who was to serve tea had to be quite nimble and deft with handling the large tea pot. Bearing the tea pot raised up to his shoulders, he had to walk half way up the room, then pour tea into an offering cup on the altar, come back to the center of the room, lower the tea pot and raise his right leg slightly. Supporting the tea pot on his right thigh he would pour a drop into his left palm and lick it. Only after that would he serve tea to father and all the others in the line. After everybody's cups were filled, the senior-most lopon (Dz. *slob dpon*) or gomchen (Dz. *sgom chen*)—a Buddhist teacher or a lay priest, who ever happened to be present—would drone the lengthy litany of tea offering while others joined in and the children waited impatiently. 'Dresi' (Dz. *'bras sil*), a preparation of white rice cooked from the prestigious 'bondril' (Dz. *sbon 'bras*), similar to the Indian Basmati, was then served. While the more important people were given a bowl filled with the rice, others had to hold out their bowls to be served. The fine long grains with an endearingly aromatic flavor, mixed with saffron (Dz. *dri bzang*), fresh butter and brown sugar, was served heaped in bowls.

'Droma' (Dz. *gro ma*) (*Potentilla arbuscula*), consisting of tiny sweet potato-like tubers collected from the high mountains, cooked with a little sugar, fresh cheese cubes and butter to a pulpy consistency, was served immediately after the tea and rice. The sweet, soft, starchy taste would just be lingering in the mouth when it had to be washed down with saffron tea, for 'droma' and 'drisang' were to be taken together.

Then one after another four different teas were served; first 'Ja karpo' (Dz. *ja dkar po*) or a white tea which was just butter and water cooked with salt was served in one of the smaller bowls. Accompanying this tea was a spoonful of roasted rice 'Zao' (Dz. *'dzar ba*) or puffed rice (Dz. *sbo ma*). 'Ja nakpo' (Dz. *ja nag po*), black tea which is just the tea leaves cooked in water without any butter or salt, and which and was not churned, followed as soon as the rice cereal was spooned out to everybody. A spoonful of 'kaphye' (Dz. *dkar phye*) (roasted barley

flour) was served after the black tea. Finally 'sona choija' (Dz. *bsod nams mchod ja*), a mild tea made from the tender leaves and young flower buds of the *Hypericum* bush which grows widely in the environs, was served. These teas were drunk not for taste or nourishment but simply for the auspiciousness of variety, so only small helpings in tiny cups were served. While all the dried cereals were spooned out to everybody, father could take a helping of each by himself from the baskets, but he also just took a pinch of each as was the etiquette.

We were now ready to receive the 'shudre' (Dz. *bzhugs gral*), the event that all the children were waiting for. The carefully decorated plates were finally brought out and placed in front of each individual. When the sun had crossed over the mountain and was shining brightly into the room, bathing us in auspicious warmth, everybody would have received all the auspicious food items. The adults would discreetly take a small item or two and taste them, but us children dug into our plates searching for our favourites. We would be so engrossed in examining our spoils that we hardly noticed the distilled alcohol (*a rag*) heated with butter and eggs that was served to the controlled delight of many adults who relished the preparation. The hot 'ara' was then followed by the ritual of sharing the 'phemar' (Dz. *phye mar*) for long life and good fortune. 'Phemar' consisted of roasted and ground barley flour heaped up in a special plate (Plate 4). The heaped flour was decorated with strands, circles and tiny balls of fresh butter. A pinch of flour and a bit of butter was given to each person and while we ate it, fistfuls of flour were sprinkled on our heads and around our shoulders in a circular motion from right to left for men and from left to right for women. We were told that the white flour in one's hair was symbolic of old age and the gesture was, therefore, an invocation of long life.

While the family and the special invitees were thus engaged, the people in the courtyard who were seated in two long lines were being served too. All the eatables in the baskets were being served out to the people. The first item served was a quartered areca nut on a betel leaf and the last item was a boiled potato.

As we children plucked away at our Losar specialties, the shouts of the village archers who had gathered in the centre of the village would pierce the thin morning air, a sharp sound of banality cutting through the serene air of religious formality. Then we would follow our father and his team of archers as they headed for the archery ground. Traditionally, a friendly game was played between the male servants led

by father and the 'bull herders' of the village. The bull herders were actually the male heads of the households of the village.

Mother made special snacks for father as he walked between the two targets she had a constant supply of 'doma pani' (Dz. *rdo ma pa ni*), areca nut and betel leaf. She had a silver container whose insides had been lined with fresh green banana leaf cut to size. She had segments of plump mandarins cleaned of all the strings on one side of the container, and bite-size sugar cane which had been cut and cleaned on the other side. Mother made quids of betel and areca and handed them out to the archers as they passed her. The manager of the alcohol-making unit of our household stood at a strategic place, midway between the two targets with a few containers of ara. She gave congratulatory cupfuls to those who hit the target, a few lucky ones she personally favoured and the bold ones who bullied her for a cup or two and to the remaining ones to whom she could not deny a cup or two on grounds of compassion, so nobody was missed out.

While the archery was going on, frenzied preparations for lunch were under way. The workers in the kitchens had to be content with only hearing the yells of instructions and cries of triumph of the archers in the distance. Lunch had to be served before midday.

Before the sun reached the midday position we were once again assembled in the large living room. Nobody was really hungry and the taste of the goodies would still be in my mouth. Yet, we all assembled in the 'big room' once again. All of us had heaped circular bamboo baskets (Dz. *bang chung*) of red rice topped with huge pieces of meat: pork, beef, tripe, sausages, whole dried red chilies and large radishes cut into fine circular pieces. Father was served his share of meat in a special covered wooden bowl. Each one of us was surrounded by an array of cups and bowls. Each time a different dish was served we had to put out our bowls and get them filled. Whether we could eat all of it or not was irrelevant, the cups and bowls had to be filled.

Hot, strong beer made of barley or wheat (Dz. *bang chang*) was followed by the first item called 'shaychen kangma' (Dz. *bzhes can gang ma*) also called 'zurkay' (Dz. *zur skyes*, 'dish on the side'). This was usually of the fried variety and was extremely rich. This could be minced or cubed meat that was fried, fried eggs or fried cheese. We had been taught that 'zurkay' was served into the smallest bowl and there would be no re-fills.

'Geygeywa' (Dz. *skyes skyes ba*) which was a mixture of meat with a vegetable (either radish or potato) with some soup was followed by 'kanjung maru' (Dz. *rkang rgyu mar rus*). This bone dish was highly esteemed, perhaps because it took so long to cook it. It was simply the shin bones of cattle which had been chopped into bite-size cubes and cooked for many hours or sometimes for a whole day. Tenderisers such as soda or areca nut were sometimes used to lessen the hours of cooking. The dish was cooked until the flesh around the bones became tender and soft. This white (some milk was used) soupy dish had a rich smooth flavor which was enhanced by ginger and a dash of chilli powder. The soup was drunk, while the bones were sucked discreetly and kept aside to be discarded later. 'Phagsha mar' (Dz. *phag sha mar rus*) was cubed pork cooked in a rich gravy. Similarly 'nosha maru' (Dz. *nor sha mar rus*) was beef, sometimes with vegetables as was 'lugsha maru' (Dz. *lug sha mar rus*) or mutton cooked dry or with a thick gravy. 'Gondo maru' (Dz. *sgong rdog mar rus*) was boiled eggs cut into pieces served with a rich thick gravy.

Sometimes 'phago maru' (Dz. *phag mgo mar rus*) was prepared. This was the pig head which was cooked for a long time until the flesh and skin separated from the bones. The meat was then cut into bite sizes and either fried with some spices or cooked with some gravy. The 'maru' variety could be made with meat alone or some bones and vegetables could be added. 'Ngatsoe' (Dz. *sngo tshod*) was a vegetable dish with fresh cheese. This was a refreshingly welcome dish with a difference where a meal was so overwhelmingly meat-centred.

The 'jachu' (*Dz. bya rgyu*) was also a vegetable, usually a fresh plant from the subtropics called 'dambaru', made into a soup. 'Phatsa' or 'dambaru' (*Calamus spp.*) was a must on special occasions such as this. The dish was made of the tender shoots of rattan and the green wild vegetable was often too bitter for many. It was an elitist dish where the taste was acquired with repeated usage! 'Kogai' (Dz. *Ko rgyas*) was a specialty that the old people talk of nostalgically, for today mutton 'kogai' is no longer available. 'Kogai' literally means skin mixed with spices. The skins were the pelts imported from Tibet basically for wool. The pelts were soaked in water until the wool could be easily plucked off. The pelt was then roasted to get rid of any remaining wool. Only the thick fat pelts were used for eating. The roasted pelts were washed and scraped until clean and then cut into slender strips which were later cut into small squares and cooked for long hours, until it was easily

chewable. The squares were cooked until all the liquid had dried up and the now juicy, crunchy and yet tender skin was fried with salt chilli, Sichuan peppers and garnished with some onion leaves.

'Hogai' (Dz. *Ho rgyas*) or a fresh salad of radish slices flavored with *Perilla frutescence* seeds, chilli powder, Sichuan peppers and salt was served. A side dish of a zesty sliced liver with lots of Sichuan peppers was also served. We knew the long list of dishes was finally finished when hot milk seasoned with a little chilli powder, salt, and tiny green onion leaves was served. Before we could taste all of the items the servants would be streaming into the room for refills.

After lunch the archery match resumed, and my brothers were not only allowed to carry my father's bow and his quiver with the arrows but even allowed to play a few rounds of the game. Even as a little girl I knew that I was not supposed to touch a man's archery paraphernalia lest I undermine his luck with my femininity. I sometimes joined in the young girls' dancing group but I mostly liked to sit with my mother, helping her to prepare betel nut quids and handing them to the archers and the visitors.

At about three o'clock, 'soen zar' (Dz. *gsol zar*) was served. This was usually white rice cooked in a sauce of pork pieces with slices of boiled eggs and potato. This preparation called 'Shamdrey' (Dz. *sha 'bras*) was a rich nourishing meal in itself. The sauce had been spiced with ginger, chilli powder with some onion leaves, and our cook liked to add a dash of cinnamon to give it a special flavor. This meal was served on very special occasions like Losar or when we had important guests. On ordinary days we just had butter tea with some maize or rice cereal at about four o'clock in the afternoon which was called 'gung ja' (Dz. *dgung ja*) which best translates into 'timely tea'.

The lunch ritual was repeated for dinner and the same items with a few changes were served. Tired, often over-filled and completely satiated, we could barely keep awake for the long ritual of dinner. The only other time when we would again eat so much would be later in the year, on the "Day of the nine evils". On this day children were told to eat as much as we possibly could because the demons would come and weigh us in the night. If we did not weigh a certain amount they would carry us off. So we used to stuff ourselves silly on that day. On Losar we had tasted and feasted on all the choicest food and we could fall off to sleep without fear of the demons. Instead, we slept in bliss, content with the

good fortune of abundance, assured by the good wishes for the perpetuity of foods and long life.

For my parents it was probably a different kind of satisfaction. They had done their duties in upholding the tradition, had renewed their allegiances to the rulers of the country, had reaffirmed their goodwill and friendship with their friends and equals, and were assured of the loyalty of the people of the valley; and the celebrations had taken place in the best way they knew how. The Losar celebrations had been possible because of the blessings of the konchogsum (Dz. *Dkon mchog gsum*: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and their personal deities, who allowed them to be sustained by their merits and the essence of the earth.

At a different level of the hierarchy, it was also traditional for my parents to offer Losar gifts to the king and some members of the royal family. Special couriers would be dispatched bearing with them Losar gifts consisting of whole carcasses of pigs, the distilled alcohol 'ara', flour and sometimes specially made biscuits and textiles. Royal reciprocation came in the form of parcels of fruits, textiles, silver coins, and sometimes garments or even swords and guns. The traditions of Losar not only fostered our relationships with our patrons downwards and laterally but also upwards, as it was an opportunity pledge our own loyalty and alliances to the rulers of the country.

As I recall now, perhaps with certain hindsight, even as young as I was, I felt that there was an undercurrent of competition among the landed families to outdo each other in trying to gain closer relationships with the rulers and, thus, secure royal indulgences. Within our family there was the resigned understanding that our poor performance in that competition was not due to our lack of loyalty but rather our strong inclination towards religion and scholasticism, rather than advancing our political and materialistic ambitions.

Today Losar for most people tends to be a prosaic event, minus all its significance and its charm. It is just a marker in time, the beginning of another year. It is a government holiday and most people think of it just like any other holiday. This is surely because of the drastic changes in the socioeconomic realities in the country. The food items and the other specialties that were cultivated or gathered, bartered and traded over an entire year in order to have something special on the new year, are now available throughout the year. The monetised economy allows most people, even the remotest populations, to enjoy varying degrees of consumerism.

One young government servant was once wandering around the partially closed town on Losar. I asked him if he was enjoying Losar, and this is what he said:

> These days Losar is not different from any other day. Our parents looked forward to this day for the entire year. This was the day that they ate their best foods. They ate rare and special things, meats and exotic candies etc. This was the day everybody got a new set of clothes. Times have changed and the ways have changed too. All sorts of food is available all the time and you can buy new clothes every day too. Losar is fun only for those who play archery or those who enjoy gambling.

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Plate 1: Image of Rdo rje gling pa, from a Thangka at Ogyen Choling



Plate 2: Greeting the Zhabdrung with regional foods (from a Thangka at Ogyen Choling)



Plate 3: Intricately crafted fried biscuits (Dz. *tshogs*)



Plate 4: Phemar (Dz. *phye mar*) dish symbolising long life and good fortune



Plate 5: Meal Served in the courtyard of Ogyen Choling



Plate 6: Intricate biscuits (Dz. *tshogs*) made of wheat flour

BSTAN 'DZIN CHOS RGYAL'S BHUTAN LEGAL CODE OF 1729 IN COMPARISON WITH SDE SRID SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO'S GUIDELINES FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

CHRISTOPH CÜPPERS

We are indebted to the late Michael Aris for the edition and translation of Bstan 'dzin Chos rgyal's Bhutan Legal Code of 1729. Aris published it in *Sources for the History of Bhutan*. From the translator's short introduction[1] we learn that the only published text which affords a parallel to the Bhutan Legal Code of 1729 seems to be "The Edict of the C'os rGyal of Gyantse" (Tucci 1949: 745–46). Further it is said: "Meanwhile, even if the code presented here cannot yet be properly set either in the context of the Bhutanese legal tradition or in the wider Tibetan tradition from which it stems, it does stand as a mine of information on the theory and practice of theocratic government in Bhutan".

In recent years, however, the Guidelines for Government Officials (henceforth referred to as *Guidelines*)[2] written in the year 1681 by the regent (*sde srid*) Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho have become available. In it are described the necessary qualifications and duties of higher government officials. When one compares this text with the Bhutan Legal Code of 1729 (hereafter referred to as the *Bka' khrims*), it becomes obvious that Bstan 'dzin Chos rgyal to some extent used the guidelines issued by the Dga' ldan Pho brang government as a model for his own code. As we will see below, the Bhutanese author not only followed the composition of the text, but also copied entire phrases from the *Guidelines*.

In order to show the relation between these two texts I shall begin with some remarks on the composition of the text from Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. As the full title of the work itself mentions, this text is divided into twenty-one chapters, all of unequal length. The reason for dividing the text into twenty-one chapters, although the number of official positions is different, may lie in the fact that the number 21 was regarded as auspicious.

1 This introduction was cited from Aris 1979: xxx-xxxii.

2 The chapter and section numbers refer to my edition and translation of the text. See Cüppers forthcoming.

The *Sde srid*'s text begins with elaborate verses, of which a similar set appears at the end, just before the colophon. These introductory verses start with a verse of homage to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), and are followed by praise for the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the Triple Gems, and other protectors. The sequence ends with homage to the goddess Sarasvatī, among other protecting deities, and the reason why this text was written, namely as reminder notes for succeeding administrators.

Regarding the following chapters, which contain the duties of the government officials, it has been mentioned by other modern Tibetan[3] and Western scholars that the Dga' ldan pho brang rulers added some additional positions to the set of thirteen government positions inherited from the Sa skya rulers, which were necessary for ruling and administering the vast territory of which the Dge lugs pa school took hold after the collapse of the Gtsang kings. The added positions were those of the regent, tax collectors, storehouse keepers, district governors, estate stewards, government traders, judges, supervisors of craftsmen, generals, military commanders, diplomats and caretakers of shrines (*dkon gnyer*). Some chapters give the rules for several positions, some only for one position, as, for example, the lengthy first chapter, which describes the duties of a regent.

Dispersed through all chapters we find quotations from the Indian *Nītiśāstra* literature, and in one or two instances from the Buddhist canon. These quotations are chosen with the intention to illustrate how officials should behave or perform their duties, how relations should be conducted between master and servants or ruler and his subjects, and so on. Being included in the *Bstan 'gyur*, the *Nītiśāstra*s were certainly regarded as authoritative Buddhist scripture, although the vocabulary used in some of them is not particularly Buddhist but reflects common wisdom and advice.[4] At the end of each chapter a mythological or historical person is mentioned as an example which the particular official should follow. The texts are of unequal length: the *Guidelines* cover 58 folios in *pothi* style, while the Bhutanese *Bka' khrims* is less than one third this length.

The structure and composition of the Bhutanese text also differ slightly from the *Guidelines*. Here we find only three chapters and fewer quotations from the *Nītiśāstra*s and canonical literature. Also, at

[3] For example, cf. Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 1982.

[4] See Michael Hahn's remark in his study of *Prajñā-śataka*.

the beginning and end we do not find many elaborate verses—only a few—but instead the Bhutanese author provides some thoughts about the historical and contemporary political situation in Tibet and Bhutan, and the history of law-giving in Tibet. This section is not an extended one, even in Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Guidelines*, although like the text from Bhutan it too mentions that the former Dharmarājas were incarnations of the *rigs gsum mgon po* (Bodhisattvas of the three families) and incarnated for the welfare of all beings (*Guidelines*: E. 20). Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho devoted more ink to this theme in his *Baiḍūrya ser po*, particularly in chapters 22 and 23.

The Bhutanese *Bka' khrims* emphasises the fact that

> the different disciplines, the Śrāvaka discipline, the Bodhisattva discipline and the Sugata discipline have been upheld, guarded and diffused externally by the state laws of proper conduct, internally by the Saṅgha which systematizes the explanation and realization [of the teachings] and, secretly, by the ocean of oath-bound divinities with real and magical powers who have progressively protected and guarded them.[5]

According to the Bhutanese author, the state laws play an important role in the maintenance of the Buddhavacana (teachings of the Buddha), and in a place where the Buddhavacana is flourishing the subjects have the possibility to strive for liberation. As it is said: "Under the state law one will attain Buddhahood".

The quotations from the *Nītiśāstra* found in both texts are taken mostly from Sa skya Paṇḍita's *Sa skya legs bshad*, but include also a verse from the *Skyes bu rnam 'byed bshad pa gzhon nu'i mgul rgyan*, a work ascribed by some Tibetan authors to Sa skya Paṇḍita, though questioned by others. Although they would have fitted well in the Bhutanese text, no quotations were taken from the sayings of Skyid shod Zhabs drung A khu Bkra shis (1531–1589), who seems to have written a work on the proper behaviour of laymen and lay officials. Except for the few quotations in the regent's text no further details of this work are available at the moment.[6]

The legitimisation and justification of power are mentioned in the Sde srid's text only very briefly: here, the ruler, the Fifth Dalai Lama, had been installed with the help or support of a foreign power, namely the Qoshot Mongols under the command of Gushri Khan. He con-

[5] See Aris 1986: 125.

[6] The *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v. Skyid shod zhabs drung A khu bkra shis, provides some information on this author.

quered the country and 'donated' (*'bul sbyor gnang bar*) it as a 'religious estate' (*mchod gzhis*) to the Fifth Dalai Lama. By contrast, the Bhutanese text provides more details on this topic: the Bhutanese state was founded by a leader of a religious school who had to flee from Tibet. If we look up the passage in Aris (1979: 209, citing vol. Ga, f. 124b from the Shabdrung's biography), we read:

> The Raven-headed Mahākāla of Action having thus come [in a vision] and conducted him (i.e. Ngag dbang rnam rgyal) along a path of clear light, gestures of offering this country of the Southern Land to him as his heavenly field (*zhing khams*) were made.

This vision was the immediate justification for his rule in Bhutan, later supported by all sorts of prophecies attributed to Padmasambhava. In *Lho'i chos 'byung* (hereafter LCB: f. 23a; this text was also written by Bstan 'dzin chos rgyal) we find that the corresponding passage has (according to Aris) unequivocally introduced the word 'religious estate' (*mchod gzhis*) for 'heavenly field'. I am quite convinced that the change in the terminology in LCB has been influenced by the wording of the *Guidelines*.

Bstan 'dzin chos rgyal's earlier text, the *Bka' khrims*, is not structured according to the duties of the different offices and officials, but consists of three parts which have been titled by Aris as such: part I—"Introduction to the principles of theocratic rule", part II—"The duties of rulers and ministers", part III—"The duties of government officials". Of the second part, however, roughly 35% was composed by taking literal borrowings from the *Guidelines*, mostly from chapters 1–6, 11, 12, 17, 18 and the colophon. In some instances it is clear that the Bhutanese author followed the sequence of the *Guidelines*, but in most cases he rearranged the different borrowings in order to compose a text in line with his concept.

As an example of how the *Bka' khrims* rearranged the paragraphs in the *Guidelines*, I quote the former (Aris 1979: 142, first line) and refer to the comparable passage from the *Guidelines*:

> *rtag tu dkar po dge ba'i las la brtson zhing las 'bras kyi rtsa ba chod pa dgos na'ang / ma yin ma 'thus pa'i nag can la snying rje ma bzhag par srog lus la tsa ra phyis lam khegs pa dgos /* [*Guidelines* 1.60] *de yang ngo tsha dang snying rje'i dbang du bzhag tshe blo bsam mi bsrun gyi rigs rnams je 'phel du song na rgyal por gces pa khrims dang / de 'og nas 'tshangs rgya zer ba bzhin yin pas....* [*Guidelines* 11.20.]

Thus, the author starts the paragraph with a quotation from the first and continues with one from the eleventh chapter. There are several other instances similar to the above.

Differences in Concepts and Contents

Both the *Guidelines* and the *Bka' khrims* mirror their historical, social and environmental situation. The government official positions mentioned in the *Bka' khrims* are naturally much fewer than those in the much bigger territory of Tibet. The Bhutanese text mentions only the following official posts: *rdzong dpon, mgron gnyer, spyi bla* [= *dpon slob*], government representatives, village counsellors and messengers. It also contains general remarks on behaviour but no detailed descriptions of duties for certain other positions, including storehouse-keepers, craftsmen, bodyguards and cooks.

The *Guidelines* are exclusively directed at lay officials; the regent mentions that the rules for monks of the Rnam rgyal grwa tshang are given elsewhere. In contrast, the Bhutanese *Bka' khrims* gives in its third section some rules applicable to the clergy (going on begging tours, prohibition against living in monasteries with women [nuns], etc.). One interesting ordinance directed at the Bhutanese officials required them to control their region so that no false monks and *ma ni pa* would roam around "who deceive others by singing whatever comes to mind".

Also interesting is the different attitude with regard to smoking. In Bhutan it was generally banned, and to this end the officials were to control both themselves and others; particularly the customs stations at the southern border were to take measures that no tobacco was imported or smuggled into the country. The use of tobacco was seen as against the religion and therefore harmful to the state. Reference to Padmasambhava is made in support of this view. In contrast, the Tibetan author banned smoking only in government buildings lest they catch fire. A similarly more liberal attitude is found in the Tibetan version regarding natural needs. Whereas the Bhutanese author prohibits all such activities, the Tibetan regent orders officials at remote stations to be discrete, and to avoid any misbehaviour with women who already have a partner.

In opposition to the *Guidelines* the *Bka' khrims* very much regulates the behaviour of officials according to the Vinaya. The rules in the former are mere job descriptions and descriptions of routines to follow. The Bhutanese author, on the other hand, deals with religious practices. Punishments should be given to those who transgress their monastic vows.

Regarding the country's subjects or population, the texts differ in their view. The Bhutanese text gives the ordinance that the officials should investigate and see whether all people are living in happiness, and that there is no poverty or injustice to be found in the country. This kind of investigation is not of interest in the Tibetan case. Here, the officials are enjoined to investigate whether there is any blame or harm done to the government. The shift of focus from the 'happiness' of the people to the 'protection' of the good name of the government is an underlying tone in the text of Tibet. The term *lar rgya* which describes this fact is completely missing in the Bhutanese text.

That the Bhutanese author took the *Guidelines* of the Tibetan regent as a model for his own law book is not that surprising, given that the borrowing and copying of others' writings is a well-known fact among the literati of Tibet. The problem lies in the political situation and the hostile attitudes between the two countries. In particular, in ch. 20 of the *Guidelines*, there is found the section on the duties of the district governor, and the ordinances to suppress the *Kar 'Brug* (i.e. the *Karma pa* and *'Brug pa Bka' brgyud pa*) as much as possible, because the *'Brug pa*s came into being by a perverted *smon lam* and the fact that they are followers of Hva shang's system.[7] The Tibetan expression *mgo gnon gang thub* is echoed by the Bhutanese author in his introduction, in a quite caustic statement about the new class of rulers in Tibet who are biased and full of religious prejudice, a tone altogether missing in the Dharmarājas of the previous periods. As a reply to this hostile Tibetan attitude, Bstan 'dzin chos rgyal answers with two verses from the *Sa skya legs bshad* (no. 52 and 109):

> Even though the jackal howls with arrogance,
> The lion bears compassion [towards him];

and

> The great being examines his own faults;
> The bad man looks for faults in others.

[7] I.e. Hva Shang Mahāyāna, the monk from China, who was a participant in the well-known debate at Bsam yas.

When comparing the differences between Tibet and Bhutan regarding the two countries' policy and the administration, I have restricted myself at present to those two legal texts of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The subject is much more extensive, and one will obtain a clearer picture if one consults the vast amount of documents available, for example, in the Lhasa Archives and various repositories in Bhutan, from which we can extract the actual administrative and legal day-to-day practice of the two countries.

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ACQUIRING POWER: BECOMING A PAWO (*DPA' BO*)

TANDIN DORJI

INTRODUCTION

On the third morning of Bala Bongko (*Ba la Bon skor*),[1] a local festival in honour of Radrap (Ra dgra), the local deity of Wangdue Phodrang (Dbang 'dus pho brang) in western Bhutan, several mediums foretell the future of each household in particular and the whole village in general. These mediums are a pawo (*dpa 'bo*), a neljorma (*rnal 'byor ma*) as well as a pochu (*dpa 'bo chung*). By trend the attention of the people is generally arrested by the predictions of the pawo but there definitely are some who prefer to listen to the pochu.

The term pochu essentially means 'little pawo' implying that he is no more than a novice in the hierarchy of mediums. Against this background, this paper will drive towards understanding the status of the pochu as well as the requirements that he has to fulfil to become a pawo. An attempt will also be made to find out if the 'little pawo' has a ritual space of his own even in the villages where there are other seasoned mediums called pawo or neljorma.

MEDIUMS IN BHUTAN: TERMINOLOGIES AND THEIR CURRENT STATUS

Bhutan is still a land where almost 80 percent of the population live in the villages, and some as far as two days' walk from the road. Consequently, local beliefs, festivals, non-Buddhist rituals and folklore are still very vibrant. The ritual specialists and local priests are always

[1] The festival is conducted from 18th to 20th of the first month of the lunar calendar. For more information on the festival see Dorji n.d., "The cult of Radrap (Ra dgra), 'Nep' of Wangdue Phodrang (Bhutan)". Note: transliterations are given in italics and within brackets. An asterisk indicates that the term belongs to a dialect and has no obvious orthography. A suggested transliteration is provided only at the first occurrence of the term.

actually engaged in performing the non-Buddhist rituals. However, in spite of it being a being a lucrative profession, in most cases the specialists are left without a successor. For instance, during the festival of Bala Bongko in the early 1980s there used to at least five mediums to conduct the festival. But today there are just two and most recently the festival had to be conducted by a pochu and once by a neljorma, as the organisers could not find a pawo. This is a clear indication that as in other parts of the Tibetan world the profession of a medium is declining and no longer coveted.

One of the reasons is definitely the influence of Buddhism. With the development of the country, Buddhist institutions in the form of temples, monasteries, and dzongs (*rdzong*)[2] have punctuated the Bhutanese landscape. Buddhist festivals, mainly Tshechu (*tshes bcu*), that celebrate the deeds of Padmasambhava have been introduced and performed in regions where they were not organised before. As most of the non-Buddhist rituals entail animal sacrifices, the mediums and ritual specialists, who are now basically Buddhist, are no longer very keen on carrying out that responsibility. This profession, although lucrative, has been now reduced to an obligation. The only reason for its survival is social pressure, coupled with the fear that bad luck might fall on them, resulting from the wrath of their personal deity for not accomplishing their traditional duty. The other reason for the steady decline in the number of mediums could be economic development itself. Nowadays, people are exposed to new ideas and eventually the popular rituals appear unattractive. As a consequence, the charm and the colour of the popular festivals are bound to steadily fade as the institution of mediums is left with hardly any interested successors. It is thanks to the involuntary mode of becoming possessed and ultimately being obliged to succeed a particular medium that there are still some mediums. We will discuss this point at a later stage in this paper.

The terminology applied to mediums varies from region to region. The pawo and neljorma are common terms used in western Bhutan, whereas in central Bhutan the mediums are also referred to as phajo (*pha jo*) and bonpo (*bon po*). The terms phramin (**phra min*), jomo (*jo mo*) and terdag (*gter bdag*)[3] are mainly applied to the mediums or ritu-

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[2] A *rdzong* in simple terms would be a fortress that accommodates both religious and temporal affairs.

[3] See Pommaret 1998.

al specialists of the east. Lhabap (*lha 'bab pa*) is used in the eastern valleys of Merag and Sagteng while *jhã̄kri* is used for those catering to the people of the south. This categorisation is nevertheless somewhat fluid as, for instance, the term phajo is also used in some pockets of eastern and western Bhutan. Similarly, the term bonpo is also used in the east.

It is also interesting to note that all these ritual specialists function without any obstruction in any part of Bhutan. The jomo and terdag are the best examples of those who cater almost throughout Bhutan. An independent study would be necessary to shed light on the specific responsibilities, personal deities, modalities of performing rituals as well as the costume and ritual instruments that these mediums use.

Becoming a Medium: Two Different Patterns of Transmissions

In general, there are two main approaches of becoming a medium, voluntary and involuntary.[4]

1. *Voluntary*

The voluntary method of becoming a pawo can itself be subdivided into two:

1.1 *Hereditary transmission*

Though rare these days, one of the sons of the pawo may succeed him once he has become old and is unable to perform the ritual anymore.

1.2 *Transmission to interested candidate outside the family circle*

In this case the pawo has to look for a successor outside the family circle when he does not have anyone to succeed him, or if his sons are employed in government service and unwilling to follow in his footsteps. In this situation the pawo negotiates with an interested candidate and imparts his knowledge to his successor.

[4] It is important to remark that the use of the term medium in this paper would actually imply to pawo.

2. *Involuntary*

In this approach there are also two ways of transmission:

2.1 *Transmission through supernatural intervention*

The supernatural intervention at the initial stage takes place in dreams. The personal deity or the spirit of the deceased pawo manifests in the dream of the chosen successor and commands him to take up the profession of a medium. If the latter refuses to take heed of the communication that he receives in his dream, he would then be possessed either by the spirit of the deceased pawo who is in search of a successor or by the personal deity of the deceased pawo. However, the possessed person does not necessarily have to be known to the pawo, he can also be a complete stranger. The chosen successor is ultimately left with no choice other than to respond to the spiritual command, and looks for a seasoned pawo or neljorma to learn the art of a medium. Failing to do so would normally result in psychological imbalance, sleep-walking, entering into a trance, having seizures that make him unconscious, or wandering in solitude. The most common affliction that results from the refusal of a candidate to respond to the divine call is the loss of the sense of touch, an affliction with symptoms similar to the onset of leprosy.[5]

2.2 *Transmission through social pressure*

In the villages where there are influential people and the local community is united, one of the sons of the pawo will be forced to succeed his father. If the pawo does not have a son the local community may also try to motivate his relatives or other people from a low-income group[6] to take up the profession. The community may even try to attract candidates through incentives, such as exemption from contribution of labour-in-kind for the developmental activities of the village.

It is the general belief of the local community that if the transmission is through the hereditary mode, the master, who is also the father

[5] Oral communication of Pawo Trashi Penjor who is 40 years old. He comes from Shelngo Jangsa village of Shaba Gewog (Paro Dzongkhag) and inherited the art from his late father who had also been a pawo (Personal interview of May 28, 2003).

[6] The low income group in the local context would be people without land or with little land. This group of people earn their livelihood mainly by working for people with large land holdings or in the construction and industries as labourer.

of the novice, would impart all his secret knowledge. For that reason, the ones who take up the profession through hereditary transmission are regarded as more powerful than the others. Those mediums chosen by gods and spirits to become their mouthpiece[7] are also considered to be of equal stature.

Searching for a Master

Once the candidate has accepted to take up the profession he must look for a master. The task is difficult since not all pawo or neljorma can serve as a master, even if they accept to do so. This is because the choice of the master is based on a simple invariable rule that the personal deity of the master medium should be of higher level if possible or at least on a par with the deity of candidate.

It is important to mention that the mediums have a wide range of patron deities who help them to predict, perform rituals, subdue the spirits and cure the patients. However, the degree of their importance varies a great deal. The patron deities are placed in a hierarchical order depending upon their territorial dominance. The major deities control large areas whereas the minor ones have small areas under their jurisdiction. Interestingly, the area under the control of minor deities also forms a part of the land under the influence of the major deities. Consequently, the minor deities appear as representatives of the major ones in a particular region.

If the candidate chooses a master whose patron deity is lower in degree of importance and learns the medium's art from him or her, it is believed that both the student and the master will suffer from mental as well as physical disabilities. The most common symptoms are vomiting blood and mental disorder. The problem is believed to be caused by two main factors. First, the art and skills of the medium whose patron deities are the major ones are considered superior. In effect, learning from a master whose patron deity is a minor one leads to distortion of

[7] Oral communication of Sangay (73 years old) and Pema Tenzin (63 years old), farmers of Trashi Tokha village in Bjena Gewog (*rged 'og*) of Wangdue Phodrang dzongkhag (*rdzong khag*), western Bhutan. (A gewog is the lowest-level administrative unit comprising several villages. A dzongkhag is a regional level administrative unit comprising several gewogs. In Bhutan, there are currently 201 gewogs making 20 dzongkhags.)

the art that results in mental disorder of the candidate. The second reason relates to the 'ego problem' of the major deity. The major deity is 'insulted' that a candidate who is under his jurisdiction should be learning from a medium whose patron deity is inferior to him. Consequently, the major deity reacts and displays his grievance by harming both the student and the master, with physical as well as mental problems.

Nevertheless, the situation is not disheartening as there is a solution if the neophyte cannot find any medium who qualifies to be his master. In such cases, the neophyte has to visit the temple of his patron deity to make offerings consisting of butter lamps, food, fruits, meat and alcohol, along with a white scarf and some money. There he submits himself to the service of the deity and also accepts to be his spokesman after receiving the necessary training. In return he receives a scarf from the temple of the deity. Thereafter, the neophyte can choose any master to teach him without having to consider the hierarchy of the patron deities and the fear of suffering from their wrath for not adhering to the rules.

Initiation

Regardless of the mode of transmission, once the chosen candidate takes up the profession of a medium, he has to find a master[8] from his village or a neighbouring village. Proximity is very important because the apprentice does not learn the art as a regular student. After the master has been chosen the candidate enters into an initiation meditation lasting three days and nights. For the candidates who have been selected through the divine call, the "sickness, dreams, and ecstasies in themselves constitute an initiation; that is, they transform the profane, pre-'choice' individual into a technician of the sacred".[9] This moment is definitely considered more important by this category of the chosen ones as it is a turning point in their way of life; they are transformed from an ordinary individual into a technician of the supernatural. Nevertheless an initiation under the command of the master is mandatory.

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[8] If it is hereditary transmission or transmission of the art outside the family circle in accordance with the choice of of the old medium, the latter will have to preach and train his successor.

[9] See Eliade 1974: 33.

The preparation of the initiation begins by referring to an astrologer to determine a favourable day for the occasion. Next, with the help of his master he has to arrange for some pawo and neljorma, male and female mediums, to participate in the initiation ceremony. Traditionally there should be at least three mediums, if not seven. A makeshift hut is constructed in front of the candidate's house[10] before the auspicious day.

The day begins with a purification ceremony consisting of fumigation and sprinkling of water in the house of the neophyte. Cleansed of all the worldly impurities, the neophyte is then ushered into the hut for initiation. It is interesting to remark upon the act of purifying the neophyte, as we can notice the clear division of space into that of the profane and the sacred. The house is identified with the profane world and the hut with that of the sacred. For this very reason alone the neophyte is purified before actually entering the hut.[11]

The period of three days and nights that the neophyte spends in the hut with his master and other mediums is termed 'meditation' (*mtshams bcad*). However, no real meditation takes place. It is called 'meditation' because the neophyte has to remain in the sacred world represented by the hut. During this period the neighbours also come to witness the initiation ceremony. Even people from other villages who were beneficiaries of the preceding medium[12] would also come to show their gratitude for having identified a successor and to show that they are still dependent on his services. They bring rice and alcohol as presents.

The mediums perform several rituals in the hut for three days and nights, with intervals and respite in between. The pawo and the neljorma sit facing one another in two rows with a space between them. Three very important rituals are conducted by the mediums during the initiation ceremony.

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[10] In case there is no place in front of the house, the hut can be constructed somewhere nearby.

[11] In some cases the initiation ceremony is performed in the house itself. However, the whole house, in particular, the room where the initiation takes place then has to be purified.

[12] The term 'preceding medium' is employed to refer to the dead or old retired medium whose successor is the neophyte in question.

1. *‘The soaring of the divine bird’ (*Lha bya lding ni*)*

The mediums seated facing one another sing the song in praises of the beauty of the divine bird in the first part. The beauty of the divine bird is used here as a metaphor to describe the beauty of the dress of the medium. The second part of the song is about the power of the bird and entails the description of how it tames and subdues the noxious spirits. The significance of this part is to tame the spirits so that they will not be able to harm the neophyte anymore. It is for the safety of the neophyte, as he has to interact with the spirits once he assumes his full responsibility. Another interpretation of this part of the song is as a metaphorical description of how the mediums subdue the spirits.

2. *‘The throwing/chasing of the effigy’ (*Glud bcud ni*)*

On the third night the mediums take their normal sitting arrangement. In between them an effigy is kept with proprietary items and a lit butter lamp. The mediums order the effigy, which is the representation of the evil spirits who can potentially harm the medium, to leave this world. Slowly the effigy is pushed out of the hut, facing in the direction prescribed by the astrologer. This symbolises the chasing away of the spirits across the ocean so that they are not be able to come back to harm the medium. This ritual is mainly performed to protect the medium from evil spirits during his interaction with their kind.

3. *‘The dance of pochu’*[13] *(*Pha jo sgro kyam ni*)*

This forms the last part of the initiation ceremony. The master medium dances the dance of the pochu supported by other mediums. The words sung are about the consecration of a structure and the beauty of the place. This is again a metaphor. The body of the neophyte is considered as a structure and its consecration the initiation.

The initiation concludes with the offering of a scarf to the neophyte by the master, the other mediums, as well as other people who have come to witness the initiation ceremony. The newly initiated candidate also offers a scarf to his master as a mark of gratitude. This ritual has

[13] This refers, according to the informants, to Pha jo ’Brug sgom zhig po (1208–1276), a Tibetan saint who brought the ’Brug pa Bka’ brgyud pa school to Bhutan. It is difficult to understand why a Buddhist saint would feature in the initiation ceremony of a medium whose trade is not Buddhism. Moreover we noticed that the name of one kind of medium is also *Pha jo*. More research is needed to clarify this point.

to be conducted for three years for the pochu to fully enter the world of mediums. However, from that day onwards he can start learning the secret art.

Apprenticeship: the Training Cycle

The pochu or the newly initiated medium is now apprenticed to a master. However, this does not in the least mean that the pochu is attached to the master full time. What is quite surprising is that the neophyte does not pay anything, nor does he work for his master during his apprenticeship. The only assistance that he provides is during the preparation for a ritual by kneading the dough, cutting the twigs, and helping to put the offerings in the right place according to the instruction of the master. As will be discussed later, the pochu learns the art and accompanies his master only when a ritual has to be performed. At other times he works in his house.

There are two types of learning that take place under the guidance of the master:

1. *Theory*

Most of the words that have to be chanted are memorised by the pochu. If the student is literate, he will note down all the words to be chanted and memorises them while staying at home. But, if the pochu is illiterate, he learns bit by bit from the master and memorises the words. This definitely demands that he has more contact with the master.

The pochu also accompanies his master and learns the words when the master chants them during real situations. The first phrases that he memorises are the ways to invoke the deities. In the process of memorisation he also learns how to concentrate on the physical aspects of the patron deity according to the words. The fulfilment of this training is very important since it is with the support of the deity that the medium tames the evil. Following this he also learns, one by one, the phrases and formulas of different rituals.

2. *Practice*

Here, the learning sessions mostly take place in real situations. Whenever there is a ritual to be performed the master informs the

apprentice and takes him along. The master explains the preparatory part for the ritual, whereas, as mentioned before, the apprentice is expected to have already memorised the invocation formulas of the various deities. The apprentice then observes as the master performs the ritual. For a period of more than a year, the apprentice accompanies his master and learns the medium's art through participation in the preparatory steps and by observation of the master's actions, whether it be the same or a different ritual. At the same time he also learns other skills of divination, such as divination by using grains (lagmo / *lag mo*), divination by using an arrow (damo / *mda' mo*) and divination by entering into a trance (chomo / *'kyor mo*). The art of entering into a trance[14] is another secret and an indispensable knowledge that he acquires through the instruction of his master. Of these, the first thing the pochu learns is the *lag mo* as it is the easiest. Following this the more complicated skills would be learnt and mastered with time.

The Pochu and his Ritual Space

For the first year he is no more than an apprentice and his services are not used by the people. However, after a year of training people will start employing the new pochu, especially in those rituals where more than one medium is required. He is thus no more than an assistant of the seasoned medium. It is exactly here and also during his training cycle that he is referred to as a pochu or the 'little medium', firstly, because he is inexperienced and also because of his age. After more than a year people will make use of his services but only during the absence of seasoned mediums. He would also be consulted and employed by the community for conducting small rituals, although the important ones still remain the domain of his masters. However, a gifted and capable trainee acquires a ritual space of his own after his training cycle, although he may still be called a pochu because of his age.

[14] Prince Peter mentions that some oracles use red pepper and hashish as a prelude to entering into a trance. Other factors that induce trance are monotonous praying, autosuggestion, deep breathing that changes metabolism and the strangulating effect resulting from the tightness of the chinstrap of the heavy helmet that he wears (1978: 295). However, none of my interviewees consume red pepper and hashish as a means of entering into a trance. Nor does the chinstrap have a role, as the pawo wear light headgear (*rigs lnga*). I assume that the deep breathing and the constant praying part is an important factor that induces trance as far as the pawo is concerned.

The skill of the pochu would be noticed especially during the rituals where several mediums are required. In such a case all the mediums enter into trance and start to make predictions.

For instance, during the festival of Bala Bongko, all the mediums at a particular moment predict the future of the village as well as that of each household. The prediction made by each medium varies in most cases. In effect, during the course of one year people will come to know whose prediction is most appropriate. There are cases where people may notice that the prediction made by the pochu is more correct than that of the other, seasoned, mediums. Thereafter his services will be sought and he will start having a ritual space of his own with a particular group of people who will employ him all the time. This group of people know that the pochu is still not seasoned, but might still prefer his services because they think that astrologically their relationship with the pochu is more favourable (**khams kro*).

The influence and the fame of the pochu's master also matter a great deal in his capacity to conquer a ritual space of his own. If the pochu is the successor of a popular pawo, than all the people who had used the services of his predecessor will also come to seek his assistance once his training cycle is complete.

Conclusion

Although mediums have for centuries been part of the socio-religious fabric of Bhutan, nowadays we cannot but notice the struggle of villagers to find a qualified medium to perform the traditional rituals that have been conducted for generations by their parents and grandparents. On the one hand, the pertinent problem for the villagers is the dilemma of choice between conducting the rituals despite the difficulty of finding a medium, or doing away with the rituals and suffering the wrath of the local deities and the spirits. On the other hand, the ageing mediums themselves are facing increased difficulty in finding a successor. If they fail, this might lead, after their death, to their soul wandering in search of someone to possess as a successor, therefore delaying their own rebirth.

Thus, the free transmission of secret knowledge, though lucrative, is a profession no one covets any longer. How are people adjusting to this change? Are there possibilities of re-strengthening this religious activ-

ity? Might the social stigma[15] attached to this profession dissipate? These are some of the questions that I will try to deal with in my doctoral dissertation.

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[15] It is the general belief that mediums tend to come from the lower stratum of society. They are mostly people with small land holdings.

OB VIRULENTAS NONNULARUM HERBARUM EXHALATIONES

GEORGE VAN DRIEM

A Bhutanese oral tradition enables the identification of two alpine species of rhododendron as the plants whose noxious effects are first mentioned in a seventeenth-century Western source. The pollen and aromatic particles which the flowers exude in summertime can cause respiratory difficulties at the high altitudes at which they grow.

In June 1661 two Jesuits, an Austrian named Johann Grueber and a Walloon named Albert d'Orville, left from Peking to travel to India. The two men traversed China, Tibet and Nepal and arrived in India in 1662. That year d'Orville died at Agra, but his friend Grueber lived to return to Europe. These two Jesuits were the first Westerners to mention Nepāl or the Kathmandu Valley, the name of which they recorded as 'Necbal'. They were also the first Westerners to specifically record a number of Nepalese toponyms. The places which they mentioned were 'Cadmendu', i.e. काठमाण्डू Kāṭhmāṇḍū, 'Baddan', i.e. पाटन Pāṭan, 'Hedonda', i.e. हेटौंडा Heṭãũḍā, 'Maranga', i.e. मोरङ Moraṅ, 'Cuthi', i.e. कुटी Kuṭī or གཉའ་ལམ་རྫོང་ 'Nyalam Dzong[1] (located just north of the present-day Tibetan-Nepali entrepôt at खासा Khāsā), and 'Nesti', i.e. लिस्टी भन्सार Listī Bhansār (near तातोपानी Tātopānī just south of the Tibetan-Nepalese frontier town of कोदारी Kodārī).

Grueber and d'Orville were also the first Westerners to identify that Mt. Everest, which they referred to by its local Tibetan name of གླང་གུར་ *'Langgur* 'Tent of Taurus', was the 'mons omnium altissimus',

[1] Tibetan and Dzongkha forms are rendered in the phonological transcription Roman Dzongkha, which reflects actual Western Bhutanese pronunciation. Dzongkha phonology and Roman Dzongkha are explained in the Dzongkha grammar (van Driem and Karma Tshering 1998).

i.e. the highest mountain of all. They learnt this fact from the local Tibetans, amongst whom it was already received knowledge.[2] The height of Mt. Everest, known today to be 8848 metres, was only first measured in 1852 by Rādhānāth Sikdhar and Michael Hennessy of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, who dutifully named the peak after their former boss.

Like many Jesuits of the day, Grueber and d'Orville sent their reports about Asia back to Rome to the prominent scholar Athanasius Kircher at the Vatican. In his letter to Kircher of May 10th, 1664, Grueber provided an account of his travels with his confrère d'Orville. Kircher studied and compared such travel journals and consequently became one of the best informed authorities on Asia in the West. Kircher's grand collation appeared in 1667 under the title *China Illustrata*, a hefty work beautifully produced in Amsterdam, then a fine centre of the publishing art. The full title of the work was *China Monumentis, qua Sacris quà Profanis, nec non variis Naturæ & Artis Spectaculis, Aliariumque Rerum Memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata, auspiciis Leopoldi Primi*, although the work remains better known by the shorter title which appears on the frontispiece.

Kircher was so admired for his learning that the famous Dutch playwright Joost van den Vondel, who had by then converted from the anti-Calvinist *Remonstrant* denomination to Roman Catholicism, called Kircher 'een tolck, een glans van zestien tongen, door alle dampen heen gedrongen', i.e. an interpreter, a luminosity of sixteen tongues, piercing through all enshrouding mists (1652, II. Tegenzang, r. 2-3). Kircher was not the only Western scholar with considerable knowledge about the Orient. His *China Illustrata* appeared two years after the widely acclaimed *Beschryving van 't Gesandtschap der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aen den grooten Tartarischen Cham, nu Keyser van China* by Johan Nieuhof in 1675. Moreover, his grand collation also contained a number of wilful interpretations of facts related in reports submitted by the corresponding Jesuits in the East.

[2] The story about the often incorrectly reproduced indigenous Tibetan name for Mt. Everest has been told elsewhere (van Driem 2001: 749-752, 756).

After the publication of *China Illustrata*, Grueber in his correspondence with Kircher insisted on emendations that should be included in later editions.[3] All of Kircher's data on Nepal are evidently drawn from Grueber's 1664 letter. The relevant passage in Kircher reads as follows:

> E *Lassa* sive *Barantola* sub 29. grad. 6. min. elevat. Poli constituta, usque ad radicem montis *Langur* quadriduo venerunt; Est autem *Langur* mons omnium altissimus, ità ut in summitate ejus viatores vix respirare ob aëris subtilitatem queant; neque is ob virulentas nonnularum herbarum exhalationes æstivo tempore, sine manifesto vitæ periculo transiri possit. (1667: 65)

Kircher carefully traced the route of the journey undertaken by Grueber and d'Orville on a fold-out map between pages 46 and 47 of the original Amsterdam edition, including their crossing of the Everest massif.

A notable feature of the passage quoted above is that Grueber and d'Orville mention that the malaise experienced at the high altitudes around Everest was caused not only 'ob aëris subtilitatem', i.e. by the thinness of the air, but also 'ob virulentas nonnularum herbarum exhalationes', i.e. by the noxious exhalations of certain local plants. Sadly, today much of Nepal has been deforested. With this extensive habitat destruction both local lore of medicinal plants and a large body of related knowledge have been lost forever. I have observed this phenomenon in progress in many language communities in ecologically degraded portions of the Himalayas afflicted by over-population and the over-exploitation of resources. Yet the herbs mentioned by the two Jesuits can still be identified on the basis of living Bhutanese herbal lore and oral tradition. The effects of the herbs mentioned by the Jesuits are therefore not just some poorly understood or misinterpreted version of a local folk belief.

Altitude sickness is known in Dzongkha as ལ་དུག་ *lad'u* 'the dolour of the mountain passes'. The word དུག་ *d'u* by itself signifies both

[3] The correspondence between Grueber and Kircher was studied by Cornelius Wessels (1924).

'poison' and 'malaria', although in the sense of malaria the term has an antique flavour, and the word has usually been replaced by ཚད་པ་ *tshep* in modern usage. Etymologically, Dzongkha དུག་ *d'u* reflects a root of good Tibeto-Burman lineage signifying 'pain' or 'dolour', but also widely reflected in the meaning 'poison'. In contrast with other terms denoting illnesses, the Dzongkha term ལ་དུག་ *lad'u* collocates not with the verb ན་ནི་ *nani* 'hurt, ache',[4] but with the verb བཤེད་ནི་ *shêni* 'to catch', e.g. ལ་དུག་བཤེད་བའི། *lad'u shêwi* '[you] will get altitude sickness', or, more literally 'the dolour of the mountain passes will catch [you]'.

In the lore of alpine nomads such as the yakherders of Laya, altitude sickness is caused not only 'ob aëris subtilitatem', by the thinness of the air, as Grueber and d'Orville reported in 1664, but also 'ob virulentas nonnularum herbarum exhalationes', i.e. by the noxious exhalations of certain local plants. In fact, the compromised respiratory fitness caused by the inhalation of the airborne aromatic particles released by these plants is most probably something altogether different from altitude sickness. None the less, the resultant respiratory condition is likewise qualified in Dzongkha as ལ་དུག་ *lad'u* 'altitude sickness'.

The herbs in question are the fragrant flowering plants known in Dzongkha as བ་ལུ་ *b'alu*, i.e. *Rhododendron anthopogon*, and སུ་ལུ་ *sulu*, i.e. *Rhododendron setosum*. These two plants are compact dwarf rhododendrons which very frequently grow together in associated bunches. Consequently they are often referred to collectively as བ་ལུ་སུ་ལུ་ *b'alu-sulu*. The leaves of both aromatic dwarf shrubs are collected and sold for the fine incense which they produce. Both *b'alu* and *sulu* are available every weekend at the Thimphu market, and their aromatic properties are common knowledge to the Bhutanese. Neither rhododendron species is exclusively endemic to Bhutan, however. Both *b'alu* and *sulu* occur throughout undisturbed portions of the Himalayan range between altitudes of 3600 to 4800 metres,

[4] The verb ན་ནི་ *nani* 'hurt, ache' has the stems <na ~ nâ>, whereby the alternating vocalism is not reflected in traditional orthography. Morphophonological patterns affecting vocalism are a feature of many Dzongkha verbs, invariably disguised by the native orthography.

and *sulu* may occur at altitudes as low as 2700 metres. In her lovely book on the wild rhododendrons of Bhutan, Pradhan duly notes that the leaves of *Rhododendron setosum* 'yield aromatic oil used in perfumery and cosmetics' (1999: 43).

Knowledge of the noxious effects of the plants in their wild state is less widespread, however. Yet these effects are well-known to alpine peoples such as the yakherders of Laya. Respiratory difficulties can be seen in some individuals who inhale the pollen and aromatic airborne particles released by the plant in the summertime, or as Grueber reported 'æstivo tempore'. In fact, བ་ལུ་ *b'alu* flowers from April through July, and སུ་ལུ་ *sulu* flowers from June through August. The effects are obviously aggravated in sensitive individuals when, lured by the lovely fragrance of these plants, unsuspecting admirers attempt to inhale whole nosefuls at close range.

According to local lore, if a mischievous person were to hold his breath and lash out with his walking stick at the *b'alu-sulu* growing alongside the trail, outsiders following him would end up inhaling the pleasantly aromatic but 'virulent exhalations'. The perpetrator could use this trick to his advantage on unwary outsiders. In fact, knowledgeable Bhutanese trekking guides are quick to warn outsiders of the adverse effects of inhaling the airborne particles released by *b'alu-sulu* on the trail. For people not accustomed to the elevation, the scent seems to trigger or aggravate respiratory difficulties associated with high altitudes.[5]

[5] Charles Edward Albert Ramble at Oxford reports that this article reminded him of the bad reputation in Mustang of low, white-flowering *Stellera spp*. related to Daphne and likewise used to make Himalayan paper: 'Two names for it in different parts of Mustang are *gumburajagpa* and *sibri mentog*. The etymology of the first I don't know, except that *ajagpa* means 'bad'. *Gumbu* by itself means spilt grain that is gleaned, but I don't know if that's what its derivation is in the present case. *Mentog* of course you know (*me-tog*), while *sibri* means 'body odour'. The plant doesn't smell too bad at all to me, but all the Mustangis I've met dislike it, less on the basis of the reputedly malodorous bouquet than the reputation the smell of the flowers has for causing headaches and nausea.' (letter of 9 July 2005)



Plate 1: བ་ལུ་ *b’alu*, i.e. *Rhododendron anthopogon* (reproduced from Pradhan 1999: 50, with kind permission)



Plate 2: སུ་ལུ་ *sulu*, *Rhodendron setosum* (reproduced from Pradhan 1999: 42, with kind permission)



Plate 3: བ་ལུ་སུ་ལུ *b'alu-sulu* dried for use as incense, mixed with ཤུག་པ་ *shup* 'juniper', *Juniperus recurva*, and spikenard, *Nardostachys jatamansi*, known in Dzongkha as བསང་རྫས་བྱི་ལི་མཇུག་མ་ *sangdzä b'jilijum* 'cat's tail incense' or alternatively as སྤང་སྤོས *pangpo*

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KAḤ THOG PA BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN (1466–1540) AND THE FOUNDATION OF O RGYAN RTSE MO IN SPA GRO

FRANZ-KARL EHRHARD

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the monastery of Kaḥ thog in eastern Tibet in the year 1159 marked an important step in the consolidation of the Rnying ma pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its founder, Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs (1122–1192), occupies a prominent place in the transmission known as the 'Spoken Teachings' (*bka' ma*). This specific teaching tradition was further spread by a number of abbots, known collectively as the 'Succession of Teachers [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]' (*bla rabs bcu gsum*). According to one way of counting, the list begins with Spyan snga Bsod nams 'bum [pa] (b. 1222) and ends with Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1395–1458); the two immediate successors of Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs, Gtsang ston Rdo rje rgyal mtshan (1126–1216) and Byams pa 'bum [pa] (1179–1252), are not included in this particular list of successive regents of the glorious Kaḥ thog monastery.[1]

In the historiographical literature of the Rnying ma pa school, the period of the next series of abbots—called the 'Succession of Attendants [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]' (*drung rabs bcu gsum*)—is characterised by an increasing influence of the tradition of the 'Treasure Teachings' (*gter ma*), which led to a slight diminishing of the importance of the Spoken Teachings tradition. This event is linked to the journey of Drung Nam mkha' seng ge, the first in this list of abbots, to the region of Lho brag, where he became the 'master of the teachings' (*chos bdag*) of the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling-

[1] See Bya bral Rin po che Sangs rgyas rdo rje (b. 1913), *Dpal rgyal rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa'i gdan rabs brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa rin po che'i phreng ba lta bu'i gtam*, n.p., n.d., fols. 31a/5–37a/4. The author states that this way of counting follows the *Mtshan bsdoms gsol 'debs* of the teachers of Kaḥ thog composed by Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880–1925), *Ibid*.: fol. 31b/1–2. The same authority is acknowledged by Mkhan chen 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (b.1929), *Gsang chen bstan pa'i chu 'go rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus brjod pa 'chi med lha'i rnga sgra ngo mtshar rna ba'i dga' ston*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996, 54.3–5.

pa (1403–1478). This particular phase of new spiritual developments within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century was also the period when the exponent who would later create a subschool known as the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa or Mon lugs Kaḥ thog pa received his training.[2]

A first assessment of the history of this subschool in Bhutan was provided by the late Michael Aris. He opened his sketch of the Rnying ma pa in Bhutan with a treatment of the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa, whom he called "[t]he first Rnying ma pa to arrive in a formal sense". According to the historical sources available to him, it was one of the abbots of the above-mentioned first group of regents of Kaḥ thog, a certain Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa], who in the 13th century made his way to Bhutan on his way to Sikkim and founded in Spa gro Stag tshang the monastery of O rygan rtse mo; the location of this old residence of the Kaḥ thog pa tradition was immediately above the main shrine of Stag tshang. It is further stated that this master had two disciples, namely Bsod nams rgyal mtshan and the latter's son Rnam grol bzang po, who both settled at Stag tshang in the Spa gro valley.[3]

It was further noted by Aris that there exists a biography of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan by a certain Rnam grol bzang po, and also an autobiography, but he was obviously not in a position to consult these works. As we now have access to the biographical tradition of this teacher from Kaḥ thog closely connected with the religious history of Sikkim and Bhutan, I want to readdress the issue of the arrival of the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa in the Himalayan valleys, and in particular at the famous Padmasambhava shrine near Paro. This will be done in three steps: clarifying the identity of Ye shes 'bum [pa] from Kaḥ thog monastery, giving an overview of the life of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, with special reference to his activities in Sikkim and Bhutan, and, finally, relating the story of the foundation of O rygan rtse mo.

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[2] For the change in doctrinal emphasis from the Spoken Teachings to Treasure Teachings within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century see Ehrhard 1990: 88, note 20. For the counting of Nam mkha' seng ge as the first Drung and the difficulties of dating him see Eimer 2002: 331.

[3] See Aris 1979: 153–54. There are two different sets of dates for Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum[pa], the third member of the *bla rabs bcu gsum* according to the enumeration advocated by Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho. As documented by Eimer 2002: 327–28, 330, these dates are either 1254–1327 or 1242–1315. For the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa in Bhutan compare also Aris 1994: 23, "The Kathogpa school of eastern Tibet operated from within the Nyingmapa and established an early branch in Bhutan".

2. The Identity of Ye shes 'bum pa from Kaḥ thog

If one consults the biographical account of Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] in modern works dealing with the monastery of Kaḥ thog and its different successions of abbots, one learns that this master had a great number of disciples from Dbus and Gtsang in Central Tibet, but there is no record of travels to either Sikkim or Bhutan. What is remembered about this particular regent is his rapport with the Sa skya pa scion 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280), who is said to have visited the Rnying ma pa monastery in Khams on his way back from the Yüan court and to have received on that occasion the *Sgyu 'phrul zhi khro* initiation from Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa].[4]

A journey to Central Tibet and to the 'Rice Country' (*'bras mo ljongs*)—the name of modern-day Sikkim as known to the the followers of Padmasambhava—is recorded in the case of still another master from Kaḥ thog bearing the name Ye shes 'bum pa. This person is known as the 'teacher from Bzhag' (*bzhag bla*), a region in the Nyag rong province of Khams, and his name turns up in the list of the 'Succession of Scholars' (*mkhan rabs*) of Kaḥ thog. One of the modern histories of the monastery provides the following account:

> He who is called Ye shes 'bum pa, the teacher from Bzhag [in] Nyag rong, a disciple of Jñānaketu, the one who is [both] learned and realized —this master of an ocean of the qualities of being learned, venerable [and] realized, in order to revive the stream of the doctrine in the regions of Dbus [and] Gtsang, and in order to search for the sacred site of the hidden valley 'Rice Country', proceeded to the regions of Dbus [and] Gtsang. In the end, after accruing marvellous benefit for the doctrine and the beings, he passed away at the place of his spiritual practice in Gtsang.[5]

[4] For biographical data on Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum[pa] see Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1): fol. 32a/1–b/3, and 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1): 42.20–44.12. Compare: *Mkha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gtsug nor sprul pa'i rnal 'byor mched bzhi brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa blo gsar gzhon nu'i dga' ston* [= A Saga of Sikkim's Supremely Revered Four Pioneer Nyingmapa Reincarnates and Their Torchbearers], Gangtok: Khenpo L. Tsering, 2002, 20.10–22.16, for an evaluation of the different historical sources concerning the person of Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum[pa], and the conclusion that this regent of Kaḥ thog could not have reached Sikkim. It it also noted that the misidentification of Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum[pa] and Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa is responsible for the view that one of the early abbots of Kaḥ thog was already travelling to the south; see *ibid*.: 22.1–4.

[5] See Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1): fol. 44a/1–4 (*...mkhas grub jñānaketu'i slob ma nyag rong bzhag bla ye shes 'bum pa zhes mkhas btsun grub pa'i yon tan rgya mtsho'i mnga' bdag de nyid dbus gtsang phyogs su bstan rgyun gso ba dang / sbas yul*

The person referred to by the Sanskritised name 'Jñānaketu' is the previously mentioned [Mkhas grub] Ye shes rgyal mtshan, the last member of the *bla rabs bcu gsum* of Kaḥ thog. Both master and disciple thus belonged to that phase in the history of Kaḥ thog when the influence of the Treasure Teachings was increasing, the cultural practice of the search for hidden valleys in the Himalayan border regions by Rnying ma pa masters from Eastern Tibet being at least partly attributable to the change in the doctrinal emphasis within the teaching tradition. At the same time, the transmission of the Spoken Teachings was restructured and new commentaries were written. This becomes especially clear from a transmission represented by Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan and Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa. In the historiographical literature of the Rnying ma pa school, this transmission is noted for having promulgated the *Sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* and the *Mdo dgongs pa 'dus pa*—the main tantras of respectively Mahāyoga and Anuyoga—as a unified system, and it was this particular tradition which was continued by Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan and his disciple Rnam grol bzang po.[6]

Having identified Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa instead of Dbu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] as the first scholar of Kaḥ thog who directed his steps to the Himalayan border regions, we are able to date the arrival of the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa to Sikkim and Bhutan to the end of the 15th century. The initial spread of this subschool can now be described on the basis of the biographical tradition of Kaḥ thog pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan.

'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas 'tshol phyir dbus gtsang phyogs su phebs te bstan 'gro'i don rmad du byung ba mdzad nas mthar gtsang gi sgrub gnas su sku gshegs). The characterisation of Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa by 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1): 73.13–20, contains nearly the same wording, but it leaves out the search for the 'hidden valley' (*sbas yul*), while adding more information on the localities in Gtsang: "At the end of his life he revived the doctrine in [places] like Zur 'Ug pa lung and Gsang sngags gling" (*sku tshe'i mthar zur 'ug pa lung dang gsang sngags gling sogs kyi bstan pa nyams so gnang*).

6 The lineage of this transmission starts with Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs, Gtsang ston Rdo rje rgyal mtshan and Byams pa 'bum[pa], but includes only the second and the thirteeenth members of the *bla rabs bcu gsum*, namely Spyan snga Nam mkha' rdo rje (b.1223) and Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan; see Dudjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991: 699. Among the new commentaries of the Spoken Teaching tradition during that period, mention must be made of Ye shes rgyal mtshan's exposition of the *Theg pa spyi bcings* of Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs; see *Theg pa spyi bcings rtsa 'grel*, Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997, 34–417. For the writings of Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs and the commentary of Ye shes rgyal mtshan, see Dalton 2002: 109–29.

3. The Initial Spread of Kaḥ thog Traditions in Sikkim and Bhutan

The autobiography bears the title "Rosary of Stainless Wish-fulfilling Jewels" (*dri med yid bzhin nor bu'i phreng ba*) and was completed by Bsod nams rgyal mtshan in Spa gro Stag tshang O rgyan rtse mo in the year 1539. Added to it is a work by his disciple Rnam grol [Ye shes] bzang po which covers the final events of his teacher's life; this text must have been composed in the year 1541, since it mentions an 'ox year' (*glang lo*) for the consecration of the reliquary shrine of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan. The place of composition of the latter work is given as "the upper part of Dge rgyas 'Jag ma lung, below the great glacier Mdzod lnga stag rtse, the western gate of the glorious Rice Country".[7] This seems to suggest that the first representatives of the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa had their residences in both Sikkim and Bhutan, and became influential in these regions at about the same time.

In the following I will make use only of the autobiography, which is divided into three chapters, dealing respectively with prophecies concerning the person of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, with the teachers he relied upon during his spiritual training, and with the salvational means he had recourse to both for himself and for others. The second and third chapters are subdivided into five and eleven subsections respectively.

The initial part of the first chapter quotes from the *Dgongs 'dus lung bstan bka' rgya ma*, that is, from "the cycle of the sealed pronouncements of prophecies for the future" (*ma 'ongs lung bstan bka' rgya ma'i skor*) of the *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa,* a treasure-cycle of Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396). The works of this treasure-discoverer, along with ones of Mnga' bdag Nyang ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer] (1124–1192), Guru Chos [kyi] dbang [phyug] (1212–1270) and especially Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, are listed at the beginning of the second chapter as those religious traditions which dominated the studies of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan up to the age of seventeen years. The names

[7] See the *Dbu med* text in *Shar kaḥ thog pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa*, Gangtok and Delhi: Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentsey Labrang, 1979, 40.2–3 (*dpal 'bras mo bshongs* [=*gshongs*] *kyi nub sgo gangs chen mdzod lnga stag rtse'i zhol / dge rgyas 'jag ma lung gi phu*). The name "Great Glacier Mdzod lnga stag rtse" for the Kangchenjunga range is already attested in the writings of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can (1337–1406), one of the earliest and most prolific writers of literature concerning hidden valleys; see his *Sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig bsdus pa* in *Rare Texts of the dPal-spungs Tradition*, Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltsen, 1981, 374.5. For the different gates leading to Sikkim as a hidden sanctuary see note 10.

of his teachers during that period include Kun dga' 'bum [pa], Brag mgo Rdo rje dpal, Dge 'dun Blo gros and a certain La rgyab Shes rab dpal who transmitted the teachings of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308–1364) to the young student. But the first and most important teacher was his own uncle, whom he accompanied up to Lhasa, when the latter embarked on a journey to the regions of Dbus and Gtsang. This uncle is mentioned in the autobiography as Mkhas grub Ye shes 'bum [pa], and he is none other than Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa from Nyag rong province in Khams.[8]

For the next three years Bsod nams rgyal mtshan stayed in the 'land of the gorges' (*rong yul*) where he was advised by two further teachers how to follow the life of a yogin and practise austerities. It was only after this experience, at the age of twenty years, that he entered the monastery of Kaḥ thog and took up his studies with the Great Ācārya Nam mkha' dpal. This teacher imparted to him the classic works of the Spoken Teachings tradition and its exegetical literature, such as the *Theg pa spyi bcings* of Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs; it is noted in the autobiography that this exposition was in the tradition of Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan. In addition, Nam mkha' dpal instructed his disciple in the different Indian and Tibetan commentaries on the *Sgyu 'phrul drwa ba*, the authority of the ācārya being based on the fact that he had penned an important commenary on this tantra. This course of study having been mastered over a period of seven years, there followed further studies under a number of teachers, all associated with Kaḥ thog monastery; among these we find the First Drung Nam mkha' seng ge and the Third Drung Rgyal mtshan rdo rje.[9]

8 See the *Dbu med* text of the autobiography (as in note 7): 45.6–57.3, for the studies up to the age of seventeen years. Only after his return from Lhasa did Bsod nams rgyal mtshan attend upon teachers other than his uncle. His own birthplace is given as the "land of Gzhag (*sic.*) of Nyag rong [in] Khams" (… *mdo khams nyag rong gzhag gi yul*); see *ibid.*: 47.3–4. This description has already been noted as an early reference to the 'toponym' (*sa ming*) 'Nyag rong'; see Tsering 1993: 43, note 7.

9 For the seven-year study period with the Great Ācārya Nam mkha' dpal, see the autobiography (as in note 7): 60.2–65.5. The list of further teachers begins with the First Drung Nam mkha' seng ge and the Third Drung Rgyal mtshan rdo rje; see *ibid.*: 65.5–72.2. A short biographical sketch of Nam mkha' dpal can be found in the Kaḥ thog history written by 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1): 72.4–20. The title of the commentary of the *Sgyu 'phrul drwa ba* is given there as *Gsang snying tīkka dngul dkar me long* and is considered to be in the same class with the commentaries of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (b.1040), Klong chen Rab 'byams pa and G.yung ston Rdo rje dpal (1285–1364). A biographical note on Nam mkha' seng ge, pointing out his his role as a disciple of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, is contained in *ibid.*: 66.10–67.13. Bya bral Rin po

4. Bsod nams rgyal mtshan Succeeds his Uncle, Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa

At the age of twenty-seven years, during a visit to the monastery of Bzhag yul Dgon gsar in his home region, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan saw in a dream his uncle Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa who urged him to come to Central Tibet and, more especially, to join him in opening Dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, that is, Sikkim. He left soon afterwards for Dbus and Gtsang, the autobiography giving as the date for this departure the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1493.

Without going into the details of the journey, the autobiography relates next the meeting with the uncle at his residence, called Theg chen chos sdings, at the 'northern gate' (*byang sgo*) of the hidden valley known as Rice Land. There follows an interesting account of the difficult process of finding the proper entry point into the sanctuary, with no success being met at the 'eastern gate' (*shar sgo*) and the 'southern gate' (*lho sgo*). It is also stated that Bsod nams rgyal mtshan took up this search in place of his uncle Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, who had supplied him with the necessary guidebooks. The mission finally went to the 'western gate' (*nub sgo*) and there came upon a site called Dge rgyas 'Jag ma lung; having passed through the 'inner gate' (*nang sgo*), which bears the name G.ya' ma Stag ri, the small group under the leadership of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan arrived in the inner region of the sanctuary, said to be like a realm of the gods.[10]

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che's work (as in note 1): fol. 42a/1, remarks that the First Drung came from the same family as the first member of the *bla rabs bcu gsum*.

10 This subsection of the second main chapter has the title "Account of the Opening of the Gate to the Hidden Valley, [Which Is] a Sacred Site" (*sbas yul gnas sgo phyed pa'i rnam thar*); see the autobiography (as in note 7): 72.2–82.5. The conception of 'gates to the sacred site' (*gnas sgo*) in the four cardinal directions leading to the centre of a hidden land conceived as a mandala is known from further cases; see, for example, the 'four large gates' (*sgo chen po bzhi*) topographically located around the valley of Glang 'phrang—present-day Langtang—in Ehrhard 1997a: 342–44. An elaborate description of the four entry points to the hidden valley of Sikkim can be found in *Sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phan yon dang bcas pa ngo mtshar gter mdzod* (block print): fols. 19a/6–28b/2 and 42b/5–44b/4. This work is the scriptural basis for the observations by Brauen-Dolma 1985: 248–49 that the gates should be approached depending on the time of the year (in autumn from the east, in winter from the south, in spring from the west and in summer from the north). The text in question is a compilation of different prophecies, consisting for the greater part of a long quotation from the ones of Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa; see the relevant section in *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa las / ma 'ongs lung bstan bka' rgya ma'i skor*, Gangtok & Delhi: Sherab Gyaltsen, n.d., 404.2–448.3 [*Sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phan yon dang bcas*

The remaining two sections of the chapter, dealing with the teachers of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, describe activities after the death of Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, beginning with the funeral ceremonies on his behalf. The passing away of his first and most important teacher postponed for the time being a fuller engagement in the Himalayan valleys, and he discarded the idea of settling permanently in the inner part of the hidden valley just opened by him.

Travelling instead to Lhasa and to Samye in order to make offerings for Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan came across the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506) in the Yar klungs valley, and while still in the valley, at the site of Chu mig Dgon gsar, he received teachings from a certain Grags pa 'od zer. As this master was a member of the family of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan was able to receive those cycles of the treasure-discoverer's teachings which he had not obtained before. The next two teachers mentioned in the autobiography also imparted teaching traditions of the Rnying ma pa school to him. In Gtsang, Dmus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal gave the 'reading authorisation' (*lung*) of the 'Collected Tantras of the Old [School]' (*Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*), a detailed list of the contents of the 35 volumes being contained in the autobiography; from the same teacher he also received the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle of Mnga' bdag Nyang ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer]. Finally, in Lha stod lho, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan received the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can from a teacher called Chos rje Ston chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan; this master also transmitted to him the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Shes rab me 'bar (1267–1326), a treasure-discoverer who had been active in the Spa gro valley in Bhutan.[11]

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pa ngo mtshar gter mdzod, 3a/5–56 b/3]. It should be noted that Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa pays no attention to the western gate. A description of the entry through this gate can be found in the writings of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can; see his *Gnas 'bras mo 'dzongs* [*gshongs*] *gi lam yig* (manuscript) Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, reel-no. L 278/8, fols. 3b ff.; this text also mentions an inner gate with the name G.ya ma Stag rtse (*sic*). For the observation that the text *Spyi'i them byang* of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can—a work dealing with hidden valleys in general—contains numerous references to Dpal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, compare Childs 1999: 131, n. 13.

[11] For the last two subsections of the second chapter see the autobiography (as in note 7): 82.5–105.5. The list of the contents of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* collection in 35 volumes can be found *ibid.*: 92.2–98.6; this is a kind of provisional list, an extended version of which is said to be contained in the 'list of teachings recceived' (*thob yig*) of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (not yet available). The teacher Dmus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal is also known under the name Gling chen Kun bzang dpal, derived from his residence in Gtsang, "the monastery of Gling bu [in] Nyang stod" (*nyang stod gling bu*

5. The Founding of O rgyan rtse mo Monastery in Bhutan

After a three-year period from 1502 to 1505, devoted exclusively to the spiritual practice of these different teaching traditions at a site known as [Theg chen] chos sdings Yang dben Rdo thang—obviously located in the vicinity of the former residence of his uncle Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa—Bsod nams rgyal mtshan pondered the idea of returning to his home region in Khams and to the monastery of Kaḥ thog. At that time repeated invitations arrived at his hermitage in northern Sikkim from Spa gro Stag tshang, having been sent by a person named Bla ma Ngang brgyud Rgyal ba. He finally took up the invitation. The autobiography records a request made by the Bhutanese disciple when his guest arrived for the first time at the celebrated Padmasambhava shrine of Stag tshang:

> The regions of Dbus Gtsang, Mdo khams, [and] especially [the monastery of] Kaḥ thog –
> They are pure lands, [and] the Dharma will always spread [there].
> [Here, in] our Land of the Mon, a barbarous border country, the Dharma has not been diffused.
> The beings who are foolish [and benighted] like animals –
> Take care of them with [your] great affection!
> [And] especially at the pilgrimage site of the Great One from Oḍḍiyāna,
> At [this cave known as] 'Tiger Den, Where Lions' Thoughts Are Accomplished',
> Erect to completion a place for spiritual practice! [This] we request [you]![12]

dgon pa). This is known from the autobiography of the treasure-discoverer 'Gro 'dul Las 'phro gling pa (1488–1553) who stayed for a period of one year with the master Kun bzang dpal; see *Rig 'dzin chen po gter bton las 'phro gling pa'i dus gsum gyi skye brgyud dang rnam par thar pa che long tsam zhig bkod pa me tog 'phreng mdzes*, Gangtok & Delhi: Gonpo Tseten, 1979, 387.1–391.1.

12 See the autobiography (as in note 7): 114.6–115.2 (*Dbus gtsang mdo khams khyad par bka'* (*sic.*) *thog phyogs / dag pa'i zhing yin bstan pa nam yang dar / bdag cag mon yul mtha' khob chos mi dar / dud 'gro lta bu'i blun rmongs sems can la / brtse ba chen pos rjes su bzung ba* [=*gzung ba*] *dang / khyad par o rgyan chen po'i gnas chen ste / stag tshang seng ge bsam grub 'di nyid du / bsgrub* [=*sgrub*] *sde cig kyang rab tu 'dzugs par zhu*). For the Gdung family of Ngang and their genealogy, see Aris 1979: 138–9; a person named Rgyal ba is listed in the accompanying table; see *ibid.*: 136. At the beginning of the 16th century Stag tshang was the most important pilgrimage site associated with Padmasambhava in the Spa gro and Had valleys. See, for example, the biography of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa yogin Grags pa mtha' yas (1469–1531), who paid visits to these sites after the death of his teacher Lha btsun Kun dga' chos kyi rgya mtsho (1432–1505). He too referred to Stag tshang under the name of the Seng ge bsam grub cave; see *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug grags pa mtha' yas dpal bzang po'i rnam*

The teacher from Kaḥ thog provides the detailed story of the circumstances of the establishment of this site, to which he later gave the name 'Tiger Den, the Peak of Oḍḍiyāna' (*stag tshang o rgyan rtse mo*). A translation and edition of this part of the autobiography, which closes the second subsection of chapter three and covers the years 1507 to 1508, will be given in an appendix. There remain nine subsections, dealing with the spiritual achievements of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan and his further travels and teaching activities. I select three of them in order to sketch a rough picture of this part of his life-story.

The first one bears the title "An Account of How [the People of] Mon in the South Became Established in the Dharma" (*Lho mon chos la bkod pa'i rnam thar*). At the beginning one finds the interesting statement of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan that he was a recipient of all the Spoken Teachings of the Rnying ma pa school and, although not a treasure-discoverer himself, had also obtained most of the Treasure Teachings available in his time. It was the transmission of the collection of Tantras from both these teaching traditions which he gave to his disciples at the start of his effort to spread these lineages in Bhutan:

> In the beginning, at [Spa gro] Stag tshang, the meeting ground of the Dakinīs,
> Headed by Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, the sky-yogin, and
> By the teacher Ngang brgyud rgyal [ba] and so forth,
> For an assembly of about five hundred [persons] with the proper karma,
> I performed in their totality [the transmission of] the Collected Tantras of the Old [School].
> On these auspicious occasions, there were downpours of flowers,
> and marvellous signs and countless blessings appeared.[13]

After these initial transmissions in the western part of the country, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan accepted an invitation from a certain Rgyal mtshan ye

thar mgur 'bum ngo mtshar nor bu'i phreng ba, Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1977:190.4–1 9 4 . 2 .

[13] See the autobiography (as in note 7): 132.6–133.3 (*thog mar stag tshang mkha' 'gro 'dus sa ru / nam mkha' rnal 'byor dbang phyug rgyal mtshan dang / bla ma ngang brgyud rgyal sogs gtso byas pa'i / las ldan lnga brgya tsam gcig 'tshogs pa la / rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum yongs su rdzogs par byas / dus bzang rnams su me tog char babs shing / ngo mtshar ltas dang byin rlabs dpag med byung*). This seems to be the first reference to the transmission of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* in Bhutan; surprisingly, it was a transmission from Gtsang and not from Kaḥ thog monastery. In the following period the main source for the diffusion of this collection of Tantras was Lho brag Lha lung, the main seat of the teaching tradition of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa (1450–1521). For the importance of the Third Pad gling gsung sprul Tshul khrims rdo rje (1598–1669) in this process, see Ehrhard 1997b: 256, note 8.

shes, affiliated to a monastery called Kun bzang gling. This is one of the monasteries founded by the great Klong chen Rab 'byams pa in Bhutan, and is located in the Shar valley. As the teacher from Kaḥ thog travelled afterwards through the region of Sngan lung, where another of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa's foundations can be found, one may surmise that he visited on this journey the sites associated with the famous codifier of the *Rdzogs chen* doctrine; and in fact, besides transmitting the cycles of the Spoken Teachings collectively called *Sgyu 'phrul zhi khro phur gsum*, he also gave empowerments and instructions of the *Snying thig* cycles of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa.

Another invitation having arrived from the valley of Bum thang from a person named Tshe dbang rgyal po, Bsod nams rgyal mtshan gave once again teachings including the *Sgyu 'phrul zhi khro phur gsum*. On that occasion he encountered Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa, who had just established his temple of Gtam zhing in Bum thang. Further travels seem to have been mostly undertaken in the western valleys of Thim phu and Spa gro. For example, he was active in Glang ma lung and in Lcags zam Thog kha; these two places, located in Thim phu and Spa gro respectively, are known to have been residences of the Gnas rnying pa, a school of Tibetan Buddhism which was firmly established in western Bhutan at the time.

But it was, of course, at O rgyan rtse mo that Bsod nams rgyal mtshan chiefly propagated his teaching traditions, including the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, the *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa*, the 'Southern Treasures' (*Lho gter*) and the 'Northern Treasures' (*Byang gter*). At the same place, for the spiritual practice at Spa gro Stag tshang, he gave a second time the transmission of the Tantras of the Old School, on this particular occasion for people both from Mon yul and from Tibet. Among the group of about one hundred disciples a Tibetan lady of noble origin is mentioned who offered the teacher a 35-volume set of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. The autobiography suggests that although there existed at that time diverse reading authorisations of this collection, the complete one as maintained by the master from Kaḥ thog was quite rare.[14]

[14] The travels in the eastern and western valleys are related in the autobiography (as in note 7): 133.3–142.2. For the eight monasteries founded by Klong chen Rab 'byams pa in Bhutan, see Aris 1979: 315, note 19; compare Ehrhard 1992: 54–56 for that part of his family line descending from Bum thang Thar pa gling. For a description of the erection of Gtam zhing based on the biography of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa, see Aris 1986b: 33–37; the consecration of the temple took place in the year 1505. The history

6. Bsod nams rgyal mtshan's Teachings in Dbus and Gtsang

The subsection titled "An Extensive Account of Teachings [and] Initiations [Which Are] of Benefit for the Disciples of the Regions of Dbus [and] Gtsang" (*Dbus gtsang phyogs kyi gdul bya la / chos dbang 'gro don rgyas pa'i rnam thar*) describes first travels to Bar 'brog in La stod, to 'Bring mtshams, and to Mgo yul. In the latter area Bsod nams rgyal mtshan gave public discourses to a great number of people, headed by the 'princess' (*dpon sa*) Bdag mo'i drung. He also revisited eastern Gtsang, where his teacher Chos rje Gling chen, that is, Kun bzang dpal from the monastery of Gling bu, had since passed away. On that occasion he gave the complete initiations and instructions of the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle in Spos khang Lha steng in Nyang smad.

Concerning his travels in Dbus, the autobiography states that they began in the year 1528, at the age of sixty-two, when he was invited by a teacher known as Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa to the Bsam yas vihāra. There he was called upon to consecrate a colossal statue of the Precious Guru Padmasambhava. The project of erecting such a huge icon had been initiated for the 'expulsion of armed forces' (*dmag bzlog*), a danger that was quite real at that time in Central Tibet. After the consecration from a throne in front of the Bsam yas pillar, he imparted teachings and initiations, and among the disciples are mentioned Lho brag [Rdo rje gdan] Chos rje Lha ro ba and [Bsam yas] Gdan sa [pa] Rab 'byams pa Dge ba'i blo gros, both representatives of the teaching lineage of the master Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa.[15]

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of the Gnas rnying pa in Bhutan and their residences in Glang ma lung and Lcags zam Thog kha is also treated by Aris 1979: 191–5, 322, note 131). Concerning the second transmission of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* at O rgyan rtse mo, see the autobiography (as in note 7): 142.3–143.6. The name of the Tibetan lady is given as Rgyang rtse Dpon sa Bdag mo drung and Bdag mo'i drung; she was thus a member of the ruling house of present-day Gyantse in Gtsang. For the reading authorisation of the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, see *ibid.*: 143.1–2 (*ding sang gsang sngags rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum lung / skor le than thun yod pa mang 'dug kyang / yongs rdzogs bdag tsam min pa dkon pa 'dra*).

[15] For the travels in Gtsang and the events in Bsam yas, see the autobiography (as in note 7): 144.1–156.1. Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa is known to have been a lineage-holder of the treasure-cycles of Sangs rgyas gling pa and of Dri med Kun dga' (b. 1347). For his position in the lineage of Dri med Kun dga' and the epithet 'whitely [dressed] one' (*dkar po ba*), see the historiographical work of Stag sgang Mkhas mchog [Ngag dbang blo gros] alias Guru Bkra shis (18th/19th cent.), *Bstan pa'i snying po gsang chen snga 'gyur nges don zab mo'i chos kyi 'byung ba gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad mkhas pa dga' byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho,* Xining, 1990, 466–67.

Having visited the different sacred sites in the surroundings of the Bsam yas vihāra, including 'Ching phu (*sic.*) and Brag dmar G.ya ma lung, the teacher from Kaḥ thog proceeded on to Lhasa, where his local patron was a person called Bkor Gnyer dpon or Bkor bdag Rgyal po. After giving teachings in Lhasa Skyid shod, he returned via La stod to his residence in the Spa gro valley of Bhutan, and there stayed in retreat for a longer period. Bsod nams rgyal mtshan's last journey to Gtsang took place in the year 1532, when he visited the court of the Rgyang rtse rulers. In front of an assembly of seven hundred people he imparted teachings and initiations from the traditions of the Spoken Teachings and the Treasure Teachings, including the cycle *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol* of Rig 'dzin Karma gling pa (14th cent.).[16]

As a kind of overview of the disciples who continued his teaching tradition Bsod nams rgyal mtshan lists about a dozen names in the subsection called "An Account of the Assembling of the the Great [Spiritual] Sons Who Transmitted the Dharma" (*Chos brgyud bu chen 'dus pa'i rnam thar*). The enumeration starts with Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa and includes both Lha ro Chos rje (here qualified as being a member of the family of Guru Chos [kyi] dbang [phyug]), and Rab

In order to spread the teachings of Sangs rgyas gling pa, this master kept up four 'residences' (*gdan sa*). They were known as Dwags po Dgongs 'dus gling (in the east), Lho brag Rdo rje gdan (in the south), Gtsang gi zab bu gling [=zab-phu lung] (in the west), and Bsam yas Ri bo rtse (in the north); see Karma Mi 'gyur dbang gi rgyal po (17th cent.), *Gter ston brgya rtsa'i mtshan sdom gsol 'debs chos rgyal bkra shis stobs rgyal gyi mdzad pa'i 'grel pa lo rgyus gter bton chos 'byung,* Darjeeling: Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche Pema Wangyal, 1978, 126.4–127.3. According to this passage Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa was famous for renovating shrines and temples, among them the cave known as Nyi zla [kha sbyor] phug in Spa gro Stag tshang. For the erection of another colossal statue of Padmasambhava in Lho brag by the treasure-discoverer Mchog ldan mgon po (1497–1531), a disciple of Dkar chen Kun dga' grags pa, and the dangers of armed forces in Central Tibet during this particular period, see Ehrhard 2000: 35–37.

16 The second part of the journey to Dbus and the last visit to Gtsang can be found in the autobiography (as in note 7): 156.1–162.5. The period between these two travels was devoted to the composition of the main literary work known to exist from the pen of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan. It bears the title *Bka' thams cad gsal bar ston pa byed pa / bstan pa thams cad kyi spyi 'grel / theg pa thams cad kyi shan 'byed / man ngag thams cad kyi dgongs don / sems kyi chos nyid mngon du rtogs pa'i me long / nyi 'od gsal ba*; see the Kaḥ thog histories of Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1): 44b/3–6, and of 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1): 74.17–75.2. The work was published, under the title *Theg pa thams cad kyi shan 'byed nyi 'od rab gsal*, in two parts (230 fols and 181 fols), Delhi: Kunzang Tobgyal 1979 (the year of composition is *lcags pho stag* = 1530). My thanks to Prof. Per K. Sørensen for providing a copy of this text. Like Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan's exposition of the *Theg pa spyi bcings*, this work should be classified among the new commentaries of the Spoken Teachings tradition; see note 6.

’byams pa Dge ba’i blo gros, namely the respective representatives of Dkar chen Kun dga’ grags pa’s teaching lineage from Lho brag and Bsam yas. Two of the disciples were at the same time Bsod nams rgyal mtshan’s own teachers: Dmus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal from Gtsang and Chos rje Ston chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan from La stod Lho. The noble Tibetan lady Dpon sa’i bdag mo drung is now identified as an ‘emanation of [Ye shes] Mtsho rgyal’ (*mtsho rgyal sprul pa*), the Tibetan consort of Padmasambhava. The list also contains the name G.yang-lung [Chos rje] Kun dga’ legs pa’i ’byung gnas; this person is always mentioned as being in the company of the female patron of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan in the different episodes noted above.

One also finds in the list the name of Chos rje Grags pa rgyal mtshan, one of the sons of Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa; he was that offspring of the great treasure-discoverer from Bhutan who had inherited the temple of Gtam zhing in the valley of Bum thang. Another disciple of the teacher of Kaḥ thog was Rig ’dzin Bstan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535), whose alternative name is given in the autobiography as the ‘treasure-discoverer [from] Chu bzang’ (c*hu bzang gter ston*).[17] The list closes with the names of two brothers, simply referred to as the ‘ones from Mnga’ ris’ (*mnga’ ris pa*). This designation refers to Mnga’ ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and to Mnga’ ris Rig ’dzin Legs dan bdud ’joms rdo rje (b.1512). If one consults their biographies from a later historical tradition, one finds references to meetings of these teachers from Western Tibet with both the founder of the

[17] For the subsection dealing with the different disciples see the autobiography (as in note 7): 175.4–180.3. Rig ’dzin bstan gynis gling pa was affiliated to the ’Brug pa bka’ brgyud pa monastery of Chu bzang and had met Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa at the latter’s temple Gtam zhing in the years 1519 and 1520. He returned to Bhutan in the year 1532 and raised treasure-works in two caves at the sacred site of Spa gro Stag tshang. These places are called Nyi zla [kha sbyor] phug and Seng ge bsam grub phug; see his autobiography *Rigs* (*sic.*) *’dzin bstan gnyis gling pa’i rnam thar las / rnal lam lung bstan gyi skor,* Delhi: Dawa Lama, 1982, 94.2–95.1; at the latter cave Rig ’dzin Bstan gnyis gling pa rediscovered teachings originally found there—and then hidden again—by Gu ru Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, an early treasure-discoverer active in Bhutan; see Ehrhard 1997a: 341, 350, note 12. After these findings, a meeting of the master from Chu bzang with *Chos rje* Kaḥ thog pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan is recorded in the text. Another disciple of Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa who had retrieved treasure-cycles from Spa gro Stag tshang was the previously mentioned ’Gro ’dul Las ’phro gling pa. He remained afterwards for one year in the company of Bsod nams rgyal mtshan at O rgyan rtse mo, listening to his expositions of the lineages of the Spoken Teachings and Treasure Teachings; see the autobiography of ’Gro ’dul Las ’phro gling pa (as in note 10): 384.3–387.1.

Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa and with Rnam grol bzang po, his immediate successor.[18]

Appendix: the Founding of O rgyan rtse mo

The sacred shrine of Spa gro Stag tshang is a pilgrimage site of the Precious Guru Padmasambhava, consisting currently of a group of eight hermitages and temples. The whole site acquired its present appearance through the building activities of the Fourth *'Brug Sde srid Bstan 'dzin rab rgyas* (1638–1696) at the end of the 17th century. Up to that period the shrine had been in the hands of the Lho mon Kaḥ thog pa, ever since the foundation of O rgyan rtse mo, the first sanctuary at Stag tshang.[19] The founding of O rgyan rtse mo is recorded in *Shar kaḥ thog pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa dri med yid bzhin nor bu'i phreng ba*, fols. 116–122.6. An *dbu can* version of the same text was filmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project under reel-no. L 808/10 (for the relevant section see fols. 45a/4–48b/5).

[18] See the biography of Mnga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal written by Rdo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1640–1718), *'Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar dad pa'i phreng ba* (*Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod*, 37), Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1972, 323.2. (*Kaḥ thog pa chos rje bsod nams rgyal mtshan sogs bshes gnyen mang po dang chos skyes 'bul res mdzad*); this meeting with Bsod nams rgyal mtshan occurred in 1529 during the latter's sojourn at the Bsam yas vihāra. Mnga' ris Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje was regarded as an incarnation of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can and, like his predecessor, undertook to open Dpal gyi 'bras mo ljongs. This happened after the death of his elder brother in the year 1542; for a meeting with Rnam grol bzang po at the former residence of Bzhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa at [Theg chen] chos sdings, located at the northern gate of the hidden valley, see *ibid.*: 371.6 (*slar yang 'bras gshongs phyogs su phebs te spa gro stag tshang nas rin po che kaḥ thog pa rnam grol bzang po drang lung chos sdings su phebs dang mjal*). Mnga' ris Rig 'dzin also stayed for some time in Spa gro Stag tshang and obtained there an 'introduction certificate' (*kha byang*) for a treasure-cycle which he later retrieved from the Bsam yas vihāra. See Rdo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, *'Khor ba dbyings sgrol gyi khrid yig sbas don gsal ba lam bzang snying po* (*Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod,* 66), Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1973, 475.1–2. (*Spa gro stag tshang du bzhugs dus o rgyan chen pos zhal bstan cing kha byang yang rnyed pa la brten nas bsam yas nas zab gter spyan drangs shing dben gnas bsam yas mchims phu legs par thugs nyams su bstan.*)

[19] For the names of the eight hermitages, i.e. Stag tshang Seng ge phug, Zangs mdog dpal ri, Stag tshang Sha ma, O rgyan rtse mo, Zims chu gsar po, 'Od gsal sgang, Ma si phug and 'Bum brag, in a modern description of the site see Lauf 1972: 89. The foundation of the so-called Stag tshang lha khang on the basis of the biography of the Fourth 'Brug pa Sde srid is treated by Ardussi 1999: 40–54. Concerning O rgyan rtse mo as the first sanctuary built at Stag tshang, see Pommaret 1990: 126.

Translation

Then, as for how here [in the place] known as the Peak of Oḍḍiyāna [at] Stag tshang a site for spiritual practice was established: this [site] was selected on the basis of three [phases of] prophecy: in earlier times, the prophecy of the Great One from Oḍḍiyāna [=Padmasambhava]; in the middle [period], the firm intention on the part of [Bzhag bla] Ye shes ’bum-pa; [and] at present, the prophecies made for me by the lords of the sacred realm.

First, from the treasure-work of [Rig ’dzin] Shes rab me ’bar:

> In all of the hundred thousand treasure-scrolls of [Padmasambhava’s] instructions, arranged [in a proper way], [it is said] that this sacred site will first prosper, that in the middle [period] it will decline, and that in the end it will prosper [again] through [the activities of] a vajradhara. At this sacred site [there will appear] siddhas one after another who practise *thod rgal*, and the stream of jñānaḍākinīs [accompanying them] in groups of three will be uninterrupted. [This sacred site of] Spa gro without ups or downs is permanent. Indeed, that is the quality of this particular pilgrimage place![20]

Would the mentioned time and circumstances, I wondered, eventually form an auspicious connection with me? Earlier, from the mouth of [Bzhag bla] Ye shes ’bum pa it has also been said:

> Even if here, at what is known as the Peak of Oḍḍiyāna, at the mountain in the east, a site for spiritual practice is not established during my lifetime by those who follow me, a long time will not pass before a sign for the establishment [of such a site will appear] and an auspicious connection [with you] will be formed!

Afterwards it happened to me in the following way: one night, during an interval of [my] retreat, in [a state] like a dream at the break of day,

[20] Concerning the person of Rig ’dzin Shes rab me ’bar and his activities in the Spa gro valley, see Aris 1979: 158. According to the historiographical work of Guru Bkra shis (as in note 15): 505–506, the decipherment of some of the findings of Rig ’dzin Shes rab me ’bar was achieved by Rdo rje gling pa (1346–1405). Compare Karmay 2000: 3–4, 8, 11, 12 for a finding at the cave of Seng ge bsam grub in Spa gro Stag tshang by the later treasure-discoverer; the manuscript collection of this finding contains an exposition of the Rdzogs chen doctrine in accordance with the Bon tradition. For Bsod nams rgyal mtshan’s studies of the writings of Rig ’dzin Shes rab me ’bar, see the autobiography (as in note 7): 102.5–103.4; these works consist of three cycles (*Pha rgyud dri med zla shel rgyud, Ma rgyud klong gsal nyi ma’i gsang rgyud, and Gnyis su med rgyud bu chung*). For a similar classification of the treasure cycles of Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa, see Guru Bkra shis (as in note 15): 439.

[I saw] on the floor of a great meadowed valley a white tent erected with sixteen pillars. I rested on high cushions [forming] a throne in the middle of it, and a [great] assembly of countless unknown persons from a foreign region [showed up], with a variety of dress, each [holding] in their hands nourishing food and special meat. They took up in countless number a [great] variety of offerings, and words were spoken to the effect that they needed an audience with me. Then the steward Yon tan rgya mtsho appeared [in my dream and] I said: "Allow them an audience and collect the provisions!" When he replied, "There will not be much space left if [all this] is collected among the many kinds of offering—food and the like", I said, "Collect as much as there is space for, and there will be formed an even greater auspicious connection [with me]!" Then they asked one after another for [my] blessing and left. In the left corner [of the tent] remained a couple, an old man of great dignity and an old lady; their dress was made in the custom of [the region of] Kong po, and [on their head] they each had as an ornament a large turquoise set in gold. After the others had gone they spoke [to me]: "Whatever thoughts you have, accomplish them! And we will execute the beneficial deeds!" Saying this, they went outside for the time being. Afterwards I awoke from my sleep, and by pondering [the dream] I realised clearly that [this vision] had been a magical display on the part of the lords of the territory. In this way I attained certainty that the beneficial deed of making [the site] prosper and flourish, once a site for spiritual practice was established [there], would be like an ever-recurring joy.

Once again, when a group [of people] from Khams had just arrived to see me, the clear vision of a spiritual experience arose, and in [the state of such] complete contemplation, [such as] had existed before in the dream, the couple consisting of the old man and the old woman appeared [once again] and spoke the words: "As has been explained in the scriptures before, you are the person, and the place and time are in accordance! You must establish a site for spiritual practice, and beneficial deeds will be accomplished!" Saying this, they turned around and again left. I thought to myself: "A site for spiritual practice has to be established by all means!"

Now in the early morning, at a time of great unrest, as before [when the local deities] appeared, [deities,] this time countless ones, came together, including [Jo bo] Brag skyes, Khyung bdud and Sho nag rga bo, and they [all] displayed their individual dress.[21] At that time I relied

upon the proudness of my *yi dam* and addressed the following order to the lords of the territory:

> In earlier times Ācārya Padmasambhava and Ācārya Rlangs chen Dpal gyi seng ge liberated all demons, tīrthikas and ghosts at the cave of Stag tshang, where lions' thoughts are accomplished, [and] they bound to an oath the countless spirits of the eight classes. Now I am the vidyādhara, the mantradhara, and I hold the family line of the Great Ācārya Padma[sambhava]! You belong to the family of spirits [as of old], and so the order of Padmasambhava has not been broken; I, a yogin, do not release you from your [earlier] oath. Protect the doctrine of the Buddha, [you] wrathful deities, and, more especially, accomplish for me wholly beneficial deeds!

When I had thus pronounced the oath in its essentials, all spirits and lords of the territory offered their 'life essence' in all the ways expected [of them]. The nectar of the firm oath I had put on their tongue, and they promised to accomplish wholly beneficial deeds.[22]

Then, in the fire female hare year [=1507], I first performed to a certain extent the pacifying—that is, the blessing—of the ground. By then I had reached [the age of] forty-two years. In the male earth dragon year [=1508] the foundation was laid. Regarding the stone base in the four corners of the vihāra, the following appeared in the clear vision of my spiritual experience: the lord of the sacred realm of Stag tshang himself manifested as the one known under the name Rtogs ldan Bsam grub bde chen; it was he who had installed the four cornerstones.

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[21] Jo bo [Rdo rje] Brag skyes is the powerful mountain deity who protects the Spa gro valley. The valley of Had, located to the west of Spa gro, is guarded by Khyung bdud, another protective deity of the region of western Bhutan. For Jo bo [Rdo rje] Brag skyes and the different aspects of Khyung bdud, see Pommaret 1996: 45–48. There is no information available at present concerning a 'lord of the territory' (*gzhi bdag*) known under the name 'Black Dice Bearded One' (Sho nag rga bo).

[22] Ācārya Dpal gyi seng ge from the Rlangs family is known as one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava. For his stay in Bhutan see, for example, the historiographical work of Guru Bkra shis (as in note 15): 170, where it is said that he beheld at Spa gro Stag tshang the face of the Tathāgata Dregs pa kun 'dul. For a family in Bhutan claiming to descend from the line of Ācārya Dpal gyi seng ge, see also Aris 1986a: 27, 79, note 25. Concerning the presence of Padmasambhava at the site, compare chapter five of the famous 'Prayer in Seven Chapters' (*Gsol 'debs le'u bdun ma*): *stag tshang seng ge bsam 'grub ke'u tshang du / 'dregs pa'i mu stegs bdud dang dam sri btul / gnas chen gangs brag rnams la gter chen sbas / ma 'ongs snyigs ma'i sems can thugs rjes gzigs / rdo rje gro lod rtsal la gsol ba 'debs*. This paricular chapter is structured according to the life story of Padmasambhava and is known as 'the cycle of the great Sindhu ocean' (*sindhu rgya mtsho che ba'i skor*). An overview of the different chapters of this prayer and its transmission—it had reached Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can in the year 1365—are given by Schwieger 1988 [1989]: 30–32, 35–36.

One night, after rare stones were sought for but none could be found, it happened in the dream of my sleep that I felt the urge to go to the centre of a great plain. Out of the expanse of the sky [appeared] a stone frog, [and] out of its immense mouth poured water; coming out continuously, filling completely the centre of the plain. Awakening from my sleep, I directed my attention [to the dream] and thought: "One must understand it as a symbol that the site for spiritual practice will be firm and become established; provisionally it is also a sign that the stones will be found". When the next day the sought-after stones were found, the foundation was laid. The walls and so forth were [then] set up one after another, and finally finished completely.

Then, although the site for spiritual practice had been set up, water had to be carried from the region of Mo seng. That night, when I was pondering [the possibility] that there might be water in the vicinity [of O rgyan rtse mo], an incomparable voice [spoke] in the clear vision of my spiritual experience from the expanse of the sky: "You noble being, who has woken up because of your longing prayer, east of here, at a place in the form of [the letter] *ka*, not very far, there really is water! Use [as much of it as needed]." So it sounded, loud and clear. The next morning I guided a few friends [to the place], saying: "Seize your pickaxes!" When we looked from outside near that place where there is now water, there was nothing [suggesting] that there could be [water]. Reciting mantras, I struck a pickax [into the ground], and immediately a water spout came up. [My friends felt] great joy, and they performed a dance; auspicious connections were thus established in a very good way. Once the inner receptacles were successively completed, the site for spiritual practice prospered and flourished.

These are [those subsections of] the account [dealing with] how to bind spirits to an oath and to establish a site for the spiritual practice of the secret Mantra[yāna].

Original Text

de nas stag tshang o rgyan rtse mo zhes / 'di ru ji ltar bsgrub sde (=sgrub sde) gtsugs pa'i (=btsugs pa'i) tshul / sngon tshe o rgyan chen po'i lung bstan dang / bar du ye shes 'bum pas dgongs pa gtad / da lta rang la gnas bdag gis (=gi) lung bstan / 'di nyid lung bstan gsum gyis zin pa yi / dang po shes rab me 'bar gter lung nas / man ngag gter 'bum shog ril bsham (=bshams) dag tu / gnas 'di dang po dar zhing bar du nyams / tha ma rdo rje 'dzin pas dar bar gyur / gnas 'dir grub thob thod rgal re re dang / ye shes mkha' 'gro gsum gsum rgyun chad med / spa gror dar rgud med par rtag par yang / de yang gnas chen 'di yi yon tan yin / ces pa 'dug pa'i dus dang gnas skabs ni / bdag dang rten 'brel 'grig pa yin nam snyam /

snga sor ye shes 'bum ba'i zhal nas kyang / shar rir o rgyan rtse mo zhes bya 'dir / nga'i ring la sgrub sde ma tshugs kyang / rjes 'jug dag gis yun mi 'gyangs pa ru / tshugs pa'i rtags dang rten 'brel 'grig gsung/

de nas bdag nyid rang la 'di ltar byung / mtshams kyi bar skabs gnas skabs nub gcig gi / tho rang (= rangs) kha sbyor rmi lam lta bu la / sa gzhi spang gshong chen po gcig ru ni / gur dkar ka ba bcu drug tshod tsam phub / de dbus khri stan mthon po dag gi khar / kho bo 'dug ste sa pyhogs gzhan zhig nas / ngo mi shes pa'i mi tshogs dpag med pa / cha lugs sna tshogs dag la lag tu ni / shos (=bshos) grang re dang sha ngar bzang po re / 'bul ba'i phye brag dpag med thogs (='thogs) nas ni / nga la mjal kha dgos zer byung ba las / de dus gnyer pa yon tan rgya mtsho yod / khong tsho mjal chug chas kha bsdus cig byas / bshos sogs 'bul ba'i rnam grangs mang ba las / bsdus pas mi shong gang drag zer ba la / gang shong bsdus dag rten 'brel cher yod byas / de nas rim kyis (=gyis) byin rlabs zhus nas song / g.yon zur dag na mi rgan zil che ba / rgan mo gcig dang gnyis su 'dug pa ste / de'i cha lugs kong po'i lugs byas te / gser dmar stengs su g.yu chen rgyan bkod btags / gzhan rnams song nas bdag la 'di skad smras / khyed rang bsam pa'i don rnams gang yod pa / bsgrub par mdzod dang bdag tshos 'phrin las byed / de skad zer nas re zhig phyi ru song / de nas snyid (=gnyid) sad bsam gzhig (=gzhigs) byas pa yis / gzhi bdag cho 'phrul yin par rab shes te / bsgrub (=sgrub) sde gtsugs na dar rgyas 'phrin las ni / dga' mo yong yong 'dra bsam nges shes skyes /

yang cig bdag la khams 'dus yong khad la / de tshe nyams kyi snang ba gcig shar tshe / snga sor rmi lam byung ba cog bzhag la / rgan rgon de gnyis byung ste 'di skad lo / sngon du lung nas ji ltar bstan pa bzhin

/ skyes bu khyed dang gnas dus 'dzom pa yin / khyed rang bsgrub (=sgrub) sde tshugs (=zugs) dang 'phrin las bsgrub / ces zer slar yang log nas song ba te / bdag gi bsam pa da ni cis kyang ni / bsgrub (=sgrub) sde gcig ni shin tu 'dzugs dgos bsam /

da dung nam langs za zi dus gcig la / sngar bzhin byung ste de yang ma tshad pa'i / drag (=brag) skyes khyung 'dus (=bdud) sho nag rga bo sogs / thams cad 'dus ste rang rang cha lugs bstan / de dus bdag gis yi dam nga rgyal bsten (=brten) / gzhi bdag rnams la 'di bzhin bka' bsgos so / sngon tshe slob dpon padma 'byung gnas dang / slob dpon glang (=rlangs) chen dpal gyi seng ge yi (=yis) / stag tshang seng ge bsam grub skyed (=ke'u) tshang du / bdud dang mu stegs dam srid thams cad bsgral / lha srin sde brgyad ma lus dam la btags / da lta rigs (=rig) 'dzin sngags 'chang nga nyid kyang / slob dpon chen po padma'i gdung 'dzin te / khyed rnams lha 'dre'i rigs yin pas / sngon tshe padma 'byung gnas bka' ma bcag / da lta rnal 'byor bdag gi (=gis) dam ma bsgral / sangs rgyas bstan pa gnyan po bsrung ba dang / khyad par bdag gi 'phrin las ma lus bsgrubs (=bsgrub) / de ltar tha tshig gnad nas brjod pa'i tshe / de dus lha srin gzhi bdag thams cad kyis / srog gi snying po 'dod srol kun gyis phul / dam tshig gnyan gyi bdud rtsi lce la bzhag / 'phrin las ma lus bsgrub par khas blangs so /

de nas me mo yos kyi lo la ni / thog mar sa gzhi byin rlabs 'dul tsam byas / de dus bdag gis bzhi bcu zhe gnyis lon / sa pho 'brug gi lo la rmang gting song / gtsug lag zur bzhi rdo'i 'gram dag kyang / kho bo'i nyams kyi snang bar 'di byung ste / stag tshang gnas kyi bdag po 'di nyid rang / rtogs ldan bsam grub bde chen zhes 'grags (=grags) sprul / zur kyi rdo bzhi kho ras bzhag sa yin / rdo dkon btsal bas ma rnyed byung ba'i tshe / nub cig bdag gis (=gi) nyal ba'i rmi lam du / thang chen gcig gi dkyil du sleb snyams byung / nam mkha'i klong nas rdo'i sbal pa ni / rab tu che ba'i kha nas chu 'bab ste / lhug lhug byung ste thang dkyil mer gyis gang / gnyid sad rtog pa bcug pas 'di / ltar snyam / sgrub sde brtan zhing chags pa'i brda' ru go / gnas skabs rdo rnyed rtags kyang yin par 'dug / sang nyin rdo brtsal rnyed pas rmang gtsigs te / gyang sogs rim gyis 'byongs shing mthar thon no /

der rjes bsgrub (=sgrub) sde tshugs par byas na'ang / chu ni mo seng phyogs su len dgos byung / chu thag nye ba gcig tu yod na bsam / de'i nub mo bdag gi nyams snang la / nam mkha'i dbyings nas gzla (=zla) me sgra gcig gis / smon lam las sad skyes bu dam pa khyed / 'di nas gzhal ba'i shar gyi phyogs su ni / ha cang mi ring ka yi sa gcig na / chu'i dngos su yod ste longs spyod shig / ces pa lhang lhang byung ste nang par ni / rogs 'ga' khrid te tog rtse bzung cig byas / da lta chu yod sa 'di'i thad dag ru / phyi nas ltas dus yod do 'dra med kyang / khos bos

dmod bor tog rtse gcig rgyab pas / de ma thag tu chu 'bur sha ra ra / rab tu dga' ste khong tshos bro gar 'khrabs / rten 'brel dag kyang shin tu legs par byas / de nas nang gi rten bzhengs la sogs pa / rims kyis grub ste bsgrub (=sgrub) sde dar zhing rgyas /

'di dag lha srin dam la btags tshul dang / gsang sngags bsgrub (=sgrub) sde gtshugs pa'i (=btshugs pa'i) rnam thar yin /

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PATTERNS IN THE RITUAL DISSEMINATION OF PADMA GLING PA'S TREASURES

HOLLY GAYLEY

Padma gling pa (1450–1521) is Bhutan's indigenous saint *par excellence* in a country that owes much of its Buddhist heritage to proselytisers from Tibet. Acquiring prominence in large part due to his status as a 'treasure revealer' (*gter ston*), Padma gling pa attained widespread renown in his own lifetime, and the treasures (*gter ma*) he revealed became the centrepiece for public gatherings first locally and then regionally. The very grassroots nature of his career, building a base in Bumthang and later extending his activities to Lho brag and beyond, contributed to his standing as a local saint with implications for the formation of Bhutanese national identity in the centuries following his death.

Padma gling pa's autobiography makes evident the extent to which he vigorously propagated his treasures.[1] Traveling frequently at the behest of an expanding circle of patrons, Padma gling pa recorded the numerous places where he conducted rituals, the sponsor and scale of each event, and the gifts received. Containing a plethora of information about the dissemination of treasures, Padma gling pa's autobiography provides a fruitful starting point to discuss an aspect of *gter ma* that has received little attention until now, namely its social-historical dimensions.

The concurrence of the discovery and dissemination of *gter ma* is key to understanding Padma gling pa's success in expanding his sphere of influence in ever-widening circles.[2] Modes of dissemination are var-

[1] The autobiography of Padma gling pa, *Bum thang gter ston Padma gling pa'i rnam thar 'od zer kun mdzes nor bu'i phreng ba*, is found in Vol. 14: 3–510 of his treasure collection, *Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che* (abbreviated hereafter as *PLTC*). This collection was reproduced from a set of manuscripts preserved at Sgang steng dgon pa, sponsored by HM the Royal Grandmother and edited by the Rnying ma master Bdud 'joms rin po che 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje. It was published in Thimpu by Kunsang Tobgay in 1975.

[2] In this paper, I would like to complicate Michael Aris' portrayal of the phases in Padma gling pa's life. He notes only the gradual movement from the early years of the

ied and change over time, allowing us to track the evolution of Padma gling pa's career as a *gter ston*. These modes—particularly in relation to the locus of a discovery site—provide important clues about the role of *gter ma* for community formation and regional identity in Tibetan and Himalayan regions.[3] The patterns that I identify in the following suggest specifically the importance of 'place' in the ritual dissemination of *gter ma*.

The first of these patterns involves the process of expansion, whereby Padma gling pa's career begins locally in Bumthang and then gradually extends to become regional in scope. This entails a pattern of dissemination that is centrifugal along a series of nodes, moving outward from each discovery site into the surrounding areas.[4] In this process, the discovery of *gter ma* opens up a new area as a sphere of activity and influence. The northward progress in the unfolding of Padma gling pa's early career is also notable, culminating in his *gter ma* discovery at Bsam yas Mchims phu.

The second pattern is a centripetal process of consolidation. It includes the large-scale gatherings held later in Padma gling pa's life, which drew thousands of people into several regional hubs and promoted Bumthang as a centre of religious activity. This process also involved the consolidation of treasures retrieved from far-ranging places at a single site, Gtam zhing, the temple constructed by Padma gling pa in the Chos 'khor valley.[5] In this pattern, we see a regional con-

'treasure hunt' toward the later years of gaining patronage through their dissemination. In his study of Padma gling pa's autobiography, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (1988), Aris states:

> The only discernible pattern or progression which overlays the perpetual round of village rites and seasonal begging tours, dreams and miracles, which punctuate the whole of Pemalingpa's life was the gradual movement that took him away from close involvement in the mechanics of revealing his 'treasure' and towards the extensive patronage brought to him by the dissemination of that treasure (79).

While it is certainly true that the bulk of Padma gling pa's treasures were discovered early in his career and that his later years involved extensive dealings with patrons, this is not the 'only discernable pattern' in his autobiography. As I hope to show in this paper, the processes of discovery and dissemination overlapped in significant ways. Moreover, distinct patterns emerge if one pays attention to the category of place.

[3] I also address issues of community formation and regional identity within the *gter* tradition in a paper delivered at the University of Michigan in April, 2003 titled "'Bum thang gter ston Padma gling pa: treasure texts and the formation of ritual community".

[4] I would like to thank Charles Ramble for his suggestion of this image of a series of nodes.

[5] See Aris 1988c: 33–39; Imaeda and Françoise Pommaret 1987: 19–29.

solidation of mainstay locations as well as the rootedness of Padma gling pa in his homeland (*rang yul*), Bumthang.

In both these patterns, the propagation of his treasures involved direct contact on the part of individuals and communities with Padma gling pa himself as a central charismatic figure.[6] This is significant, because the discovery and dissemination of *gter ma* are frequently public events, linking the pan-Himalayan lore of Padmasambhava to particular sites, texts, and objects via the *gter ston*. As we will see, the discovery process explicitly evokes Padmasambhava at a site in a dramatic spectacle witnessed by the local community. In addition, particularly at the outset of Padma gling pa's career, dissemination of the ritual content of textual cycles involved public events in immediate proximity to a discovery site.[7] Moreover, sacred objects among the treasure cache were distributed to local dignitaries as gifts. As these examples suggest, a careful consideration of the relationship between the discovery and dissemination processes is important for understanding the role of *gter ma* in the social history of Tibetan and Himalayan regions.

Local Dimensions of His Early Career

The conjunction of the discovery and dissemination process is one of the most conspicuous and intriguing features of Padma gling pa's early career.[8] Here the discovery and dissemination of *gter ma* operate in tandem, with the discovery functioning to open new areas to proselytising. In his first years as a *gter ston*, each discovery served to expand Padma gling pa's sphere of influence or domain of conversion (*gdul zhing*),[9]

[6] Nowhere in the autobiography is there a mention of a single text or object conveyed via messenger, and instead emphasis is placed on the ritual dimensions of the discovery and dissemination processes. Put simply, this means that either the *gter ston* must travel to his patrons and followers, or they must travel to see him. The simple fact of contact required for dissemination of *gter ma* has significant implications for community formation, particularly as the scale of participation in rituals numbered into the thousands during Padma gling pa's later career.

[7] Padma gling pa's treasure corpus (*gter chos*) is predominantly ritual in content. The majority of Padma gling pa's treasures belong to a Mahāyoga schema, although there are also three substantial Atiyoga cycles in the collection. Additionally, counted among his treasure caches are a variety of sacred objects. Considered to be relics, a number of these are housed today at Sgang steng dgon pa. Though rarely displayed, in September 2002 the relics were briefly available for public viewing during the renovation of the monastery.

[8] Specifically, the years treated in this section are 1475–1483.

moving steadily from peripheral points to more central ones within the cultural and political landscape of his day.

Within Bumthang itself, Padma gling pa's discoveries follow this pattern. His initial discoveries lay near his birthplace, Chal, at Sna rings brag, a boulder jutting above a large eddy in the Stang River, and at Ri mo can, a nearby temple with a dramatic cliff wall rising up behind it. From the isolated reaches of the Stang valley, his discovery sites shift to lower Bumthang and then to a crossroads where three of its four valleys meet. Not until three years after beginning his career as a *gter ston* does Padma gling pa make his first discovery in the Chos 'khor valley at Sku rjes, the principal site associated with Padmasambhava's activities in Bumthang, where he is thought to have left a full body print.[10] Here at the local level, we see a distinct movement from a peripheral location, Padma gling pa's own birthplace, to a central one: the main valley of Bumthang at a symbolic site with previous associations to Padmasambhava.

In discovering treasures at Sku rjes, Padma gling pa is claiming a direct connection to a key locus for the religious history of Bumthang, where Padmasmabhava is said to have subjugated the demons of the area. As testimony to this connection, in Padma gling pa's account of his second discovery at Sku rjes, the treasure protector (*gter bdag*) Shel ging dkar po—associated with Bumthang's early king, Sindhu Rāja—appears 'in person' to guide him to the cache.[11] Later in his career,

9 Padma gling pa does not use this contracted version of *gdul zhing*, but he does use *'dul bya'i zhing* in at least one place in the autobiography. The territorial implications of this term are intriguing. Throughout the autobiography, the metaphor of taming is ubiquitous.

10 Padma gling pa mentions further accusations of fraud after his first discovery at Sku rjes (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 72), indicating an indexical shift between the local prominence of the Stang and the Chos 'khor valleys of Bumthang as well as the symbolic value of the site itself. These accusations are resolved in the narrative by recourse to a visionary apparition—none other than Padmasambhava himself in the guise of an ordinary monk—who counsels Padma gling pa to continue to propagate his treasures (72–73). Significantly, this episode precedes Padma gling pa's first foray beyond Bumthang to discover a treasure at Ku re lung (75) in today's Lhun rtse district.

11 This episode can be found in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 120. According to the biography of Sindhu Rāja (*Rgyal po Sindha ra dza'i rnam thar*), counted by Michael Aris among Padma gling pa's treasures, the local king invites Padmasambhava to Bumthang in order to recover his life force (*bla*) from Shel ging dkar po. Aris identifies Shel ging dkar po as the chief of all *srog dbag*, which he translates as live 'owning' spirits. See his *Bhutan* (1979) for the associations of Shel ging dkar po with other well-known gods and demons (*lha 'dre*), especially p. 46. The biography of Sindhu Raja has been translated by Blanche Olshak in *Ancient Bhutan* (1979).

Padma gling pa stakes claim to another focal point of local identity by commandeering a turquoise talisman from Chos 'khor lha khang, believed to ensure the lives and prosperity of the populace.[12] The skepticism aroused by such claims are indices of the symbolic importance of a site and typically occur when Padma gling pa expands his sphere of influence into new terrain.[13]

At the threshold of each phase of his career, Padma gling pa records public doubts and accusations of fraud that culminate in a public spectacle to test his authenticity.[14] Whatever one might think about the discovery moment itself, true or false, it is an event that involved the community surrounding a discovery site, presided over by local authorities. Padma gling pa's second and most famous discovery at the same eddy in the Stang River—thereafter known as the 'Burning Lake' or Me 'bar mtsho—is explicitly depicted in the autobiography as a dramatic public event, serving to vindicate Padma gling pa's claims to be a *gter ston* in the eyes of the local community.[15]

Several modes of dissemination that occur in this early period are repeated throughout Padma gling pa's career. The most immediate is the use of the treasure casket (*gter sgrom*) to confer blessings on the witnesses of a treasure discovery, whether a small group of companions

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[12] This event transpired in 1490. Padma gling pa was asked to return the turquoise talisman "in order not to diminish the people's lifespan or prosperity" (*mi'i tshe dang nor gyi g.yang mi nyams pa'i phyir*) and threatened with punishment if he did not submit. In the end, he was forced to take an oath at the temple that the requisition occurred based on a prophecy (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 239–40). This episode is discussed in Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (1988: 67).

[13] After his first discovery at Sku rjes, Padma gling pa records accusations of fraud. See *PLTC* Vol. 14: 72.

[14] Even on the cusp of his first discovery, Padma gling pa describes being challenged by his own father who calls him a liar, accusing him of fabricating the scroll given to him by a monk in tattered robes who then mysteriously disappears. The family's doubts about their son are articulated as a test by A ne Bde legs, who says: "How do you know he's a liar?... Events will bear out if the prophecy is true or false". (*Rdzun ci shes.... Lung bstan byung ba rnams bden rdzun lta ru phyin pa drag*, *PLTC* Vol. 14: 59). This minor episode foreshadows the often repeated sequence of doubts, laid to rest by a test and subsequent conversion of onlookers, that frame the major episodes in Padma gling pa's early career. In this case, Padma gling pa gains the confidence of his own family, who eagerly receive the blessings of the treasure casket (*gter sgrom*) on his arrival home from Sna rings brag.

[15] *PLTC* Vol. 14: 67.

[16] Examples include the six disciples who accompany him to Sku rjes at midnight (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 120) and the crowd estimated at one hundred at Seng ge brag (69).

or crowd of onlookers.[16] Additionally, *en route* from a discovery site, Padma gling pa often stops over to give a public empowerment (*khrom dbang*) to the populace of villages along the way. Early on, since the distances were short, Padma gling pa only mentions a few such roadside empowerments.[17] As Padma gling pa's discoveries take place farther afield, the frequency of such single day events become a primary mode of ritual dissemination for his treasures. Occasions for more extensive instructions also occur, entailing a tripartite sequence of *dbang, khrid* and *dpe lung*.[18] As recorded, this typically requires twenty days to a month or more per treasure cycle.[19] Over the progression of Padma gling pa's career, these longer events draw lamas and followers to Bumthang from afar. Importantly, treasure cycles maintain their association to the place from which they are revealed, even as they are disseminated beyond the vicinity of the discovery site.[20]

By 1480, Padma gling pa's growing influence and ability to spur the local community into action is already evident. He convinces local leaders—whom he gathers together for an evening of food and drink—to assent to the renovation of Chos 'khor *lha khang* based on a prophecy.[21] The renovation project takes two years to complete, whereupon the artisans are dispatched for further work at his recently constructed residence of Padma gling. Here we see Padma gling pa's predilection for

[17] For example, he mentions only a single empowerment (*dbang*) conducted at Dung kha sbi on the way home from Seng ge brag in lower Bumthang to his newly constructed residence, called Padma gling, where he also gives an empowerment (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 69).

[18] This mode also introduces a delay between the time of a treasure's discovery and its dissemination, while the treasure is said to be decoded and transcribed. As such, extensive instructions are not necessarily undertaken in direct proximity to a discovery site. In the case of Padma gling pa's first treasure in 1475, after more than a month spent decoding and transcribing the treasure, the empowerment and instructions for *Klong gsal gsang ba snying bcud* took place nearby in the village of Gdung kha sbi over a period of twenty-one days. Later, it required a month to undertake the instructions of the same treasure at Padma gling. An account of the discovery and initial dissemination of Padma gling pa's first treasure can be found in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 60–65.

[19] The phrase used to indicate the complete reception of textual authorisation is *bka' lung rdzogs par gsan.*

[20] For example, when Padma gling pa conducts a six month training for Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan and his disciples, the texts included in their curriculum are listed as follows: Thar pa gling *gi Dgongs pa kun 'dus*, Seng ge khyi tsog *gi Bla ma drag po*, Sku rjes *kyi Nor bu lam khyer*, and Ri mo can *gyi Mun sel sgron me* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 184–85).

[21] The renovation begins in 1479 and is completed in two years. See *PLTC* Vol. 14: 80–82.

temple construction and restoration extending to both the Stang and Chos 'khor valleys as areas within his sphere of concern and influence.

During the first years of his career, Padma gling pa makes few forays beyond Bumthang, though he travels locally to conduct numerous rituals and confers instructions from his treasures at the request of lamas and nuns in the vicinity.[22] A movement northward begins with a discovery outside of Bumthang, in Ku re lung, a valley along the route to Lho brag, and another takes place on the slope of Mkha' ri bordering Tibet.[23] Padma gling pa also begins to extend his horizons through the propitiation of deities inhabiting the landscape north of Bumthang, notably Zu ra ra skyes,[24] associated with the hidden land of Mkhan pa lung.[25] Eventually, he encounters the mountain deity Mkha' ri in a dream as the *dge bsnyen* of Padmasambhava.[26]

When Padma gling pa ventures to Tibet for the first time, he spends only five days in upper Lha lung after being received with suspicion. A redeeming feature of the trip, however, is the longstanding bond forged with Bla ma Bsod nams lhun grub, who escorts Padma gling pa to the slopes of Mkha' ri with half dozen of his monks. As reported, Padma

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[22] Instructions on the *Klong gsal gsang ba snying bcud* and the performance of its central *zhi khro* empowerment was in particularly high demand, and Padma gling pa conducted these in numerous places, including Bsam gling dgon pa in Chos 'khor at the request of a pair of *dge bshe*s, father and son, from U ra (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 119). He even returns to Gdung kha (s)bi, where he initially disseminated this treasure after its discovery at Sna rings drag. On this occasion, he chose to stage the opening of the treasure casket, containing seven yellow scrolls (*shog ser*) for Bla ma drag po yang gsang bla med (121). This mode of off-site dissemination will be discussed in more detail below.

[23] These episodes can be found respectively in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 75 and 85.

[24] Padma gling pa's engagement with regional deities is prompted by a dream in which Padma gling pa is instructed (by Padmasambhava in the guise of a monk) to sacrifice a black sheep in honour of the *gter bdag*, Zu ra ra skyes. By this episode (PLTC Vol. 14: 75), Padma gling pa had already offered a black sheep with a white head to the *gter bdag* at Seng ge brag (69).

[25] The deity Zu ra ra skyes and its association with the hidden land, Mkhan pa lung, has received some attention among scholars. See especially Françoise Pommaret 1996 and Hildegard Diemberger, "Beyul Khenbalung, the hidden valley of artemisia: on Himalayan communities and their sacred landscape." In *Bhutan* (1979: 301, note 4), Michael Aris calls Zu ra ra skyes (also Zo ra ra skyes) a local spirit of Stang. In the autobiography, he appears only in two episodes, the discovery at Ku re lung and the opening of the hidden land of Mkhan pa lung, which seems to place this deity farther north between Bumthang and Lho brag.

[26] Padma gling pa has an extensive visionary encounter with Mkha' ri in 1508 during a dream (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 330–43). Michael Aris describes this dream at length in *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (1988: 54–58).

gling pa discovers a statue of Padmasambhava there and promptly presents it to Bla ma Bsod nams lhun grub as a parting gift.[27] The gifting of treasure objects becomes a prominent feature in the next phase of Padma gling pa's career, and such gestures are often reciprocated by patronage. Clearly, at this point, Padma gling pa's aspirations towards greater horizons are already crystallising. While the beginning of Padma gling pa's career is unquestionably local, it quickly assumes regional dimensions.

Regional Expansion of His Domain of Conversion

There is a distinct, upwardly mobile[28] northward movement in the sequence of Padma gling pa's discovery sites. His early discoveries in Bumthang give way to a subsequent series in Lho brag, at that time the axis of political power in the region,[29] and culminate in his discovery at Bsam yas Mchims phu, the symbolic centre of the Padmasambhava lore. The journey northward marks this phase of expansion in Padma gling pa's career as a *gter ston*, beginning in 1483 with his first discoveries in Lho brag.

Padma gling pa's discovery of the *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho* serves as a breakthrough into regional influence. On his second trip to Tibet, he goes armed with a prophecy (*lung bstan*) and certificate (*kha byang*) to retrieve a treasure from the lion-faced rock at Sman mdo in Lho brag. This enables him to receive the assistance of Bla ma Ston pa from the village of Gle'u chung (in Spro), who provides supplies for ritual offer-

[27] Padma gling pa is amply rewarded for this gesture with gold pieces, a gilded Buddha statue, brocade, a horse and small amount of provisions (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 85). Following this event, Bla ma Bsod nams lhun grub becomes a steadfast supporter of Padma gling pa.

[28] It should be remembered that Bumthang, at this time, lay on the outskirts of the cultural world that used classical Tibetan as the *lingua franca* for Buddhist discourse. As a potent symbol of its position relative to central Tibet, Byams pa'i *lha khang* stands in the Chos 'khor valley as one of the four border-taming (*mtha' 'dul*) temples attributed to Srong btsan sgam po. Moreover, present-day Bhutan was known then as Lho Mon, 'the Southern [Land of the] Mon', indicating the orientation along cardinal directions in currency at the time that placed the province of Dbus at the center. On the connotations of early terms for Bhutan, see Françoise Pommaret 1999. On the border-taming temples, see Michael Aris, *Bhutan* (1979: 3–41); and Janet Gyatso 1987.

[29] For evidence concerning the political relationship between Bumthang and Lho brag, see Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (1988: 69–71).

ings to the *gter bdag*.[30] Here we see that patronage is necessary not only in the dissemination process but also during the course of a discovery itself in order to conduct the proper rituals. Additionally, as we noted regarding the renovation of Chos 'khor *lha khang*, prophecies are an important means to galvanise support for a *gter ston*'s activities. Not only does Bla ma Ston pa assist in the discovery process, but he also serves as one of the sponsors for the events that followed.[31]

The mythic subjugation of a site and its local protective deity are explicitly invoked by Padma gling pa during the performance of ritual observances prior to a discovery. At Sman mdo as elsewhere, during supplications and offerings to the *gter bdag*, Padma gling pa utters a reminder to the deity of a former command (by Padmasambhava),[32] presumably to protect the treasure until the destined one arrives to retrieve it. At one site, he also delivers an account of the treasure's concealment.[33] In this way, the discovery of *gter ma* memorialises the land-

30 A previous example of patronage for a treasure discovery is recorded for Padma gling pa's public discovery at Seng ge brag (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 69). In this case, a sheep and quantity of butter were provided as offerings to the *gter bdag*. Interestingly, in the case at Sman mdo, it is Bla ma Ston pa who suggests the offerings of ritual cakes (*gtor ma*) and beer (*chang*). Considering recent scholarship on the process of 'Buddhicisation' in Himalayan regions, it is striking but not surprising that a sheep sacrifice was conducted at a *khrom gter* in a peripheral region, whereas closer to central Tibet a ritual substitution is favoured. On the process of 'Buddhicisation', see especially Alexander W. Macdonald 1990; and two articles by Katia Buffetrille (1997, 1998). For an important article on animal sacrifice in Tibetan ritual, as it varies according to geographic location, see Diemberger and Hazod 1997.

31 The other sponsors include the two disciples Dpal bzang and Dkon mchog, the three practitioners Leb sbyin, Grags pa, and Nam mkha' from Wa yul, as well as the *dpon po* from the hosting village of Spro named Bsam pa (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 136–37). There is a notable absence of political figures or a single wealthy patron able to sponsor a sizeable event alone. Padma gling pa has yet to earn their confidence, which requires a test in the form of a public spectacle as we see below.

32 In the description of his discovery at Sman mdo, we find one of the most detailed descriptions of the formal elements in the ritual preparations for a discovery (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 134). Three distinct ritual actions are noted here: (1) petition offerings (*gsol mchod*) made to the deity protecting the treasure upon arrival at the site, (2) the utterance of a reminder to the deity of the former command (*sngon gyi chad mdo*) almost certainly by Padmasambhava, and (3) the recitation of a liturgical text (*'don cha*) just before opening the treasure door (*gter sgo*). This formal procedure is either not mentioned in other accounts or not performed in cases when Padma gling pa describes discovering a treasure in a trance, using phrases like 'fell unconscious' (*dran med du song*) and 'without remembering anything' (*yid la dran pa gang yang med*) and 'rapt' (*zi bun ne ba*). For depictions of discoveries performed in trance, see especially his account at Me 'bar mtsho (60) and Thar pa gling (245–46).

33 In particular, Padma gling pa explains the method by which Padmasambhava hid

scape by anchoring the lore of Padmasambhava to a specific local site, overlaying a new association onto a pre-existing matrix of meaning within the cultural landscape. This association is generated in community events, including the high profile spectacles of public treasures (*khrom gter*) and the sizeable ritual gatherings of public empowerments (*khrom dbang*) that typically begin in close proximity to the discovery site.

Significantly, the material contents of the treasure are immediately deployed in the dissemination process as gifts. This provides an opportunity for Padma gling pa to call on important individuals in the area surrounding a discovery site. After his discovery at Sman mdo, he offers statues from among the treasure cache to his initial host, Bla ma Ston pa, and other dignitaries and potential patrons in the vicinity. Upon returning to the village of Gle'u chung, Padma gling pa gives Bla ma Ston pa one of two statues of Hayagrīva and Vajravārāhi in union. He offers the other to a scholar from Chos lung while in Rting. Along the way, he offers the *dpon po* of Spang lci a statue of Padmasambhava and the *nang so* in Rting a statue of Hayagrīva. Next, he offers the *rgyal po* a statue of Vajravārāhi and leaves a footprint in rock.[34] Finally he offers the *nang so* Chos mdzad[35] a statue of Ye shes mtsho rgyal. As Padma gling pa's career proceeds, the deployment of the treasure casket and its material contents in the wake of a discovery continues to be important.

At this juncture, it is already clear how the discovery of *gter ma* functions in tandem with its dissemination to expand the *gter ston*'s domain of conversion and open new areas for proselytising. Dignitaries and potential patrons are included as direct beneficiaries of the discovery process, receiving tangible boons. In return, they provide Padma gling pa with the backing necessary to conduct teachings for the general public shortly after his discovery.[36] At Gle'u chung, Padma gling pa

the treasure and empowered Padma gling pa himself to discover it in a future life (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 236).

[34] Note that here Padma gling pa is beginning to generate associations in the landscape with his own activities.

[35] *Nang so* Chos mdzad was already a supporter having witnessed Padma gling pa's famous discovery at Me 'bar mtsho. Padma gling pa also had contact with him on his first trip to Lho brag.

[36] For example, a learned master from Spro offers him the use of his assembly hall and serves as the sponsor for an empowerment. Following that, Padma gling pa returns

spends a month performing a *Bdud rtsi sman grub* and *dbang khrid* of the *Klong gsal* (*gsang ba snying bcud*), followed by festivities in which he serves as the guest of honour. On the heels of this, he begins to receive invitations to confer empowerments in the area.

A second public test of Padma gling pa's authenticity as a *gter ston* occurs at a site called Gad mdo,[37] notably only after Padma gling pa makes his initial discovery at Sman mdo and achieves a measure of success in the area. Padma gling pa is brought to meet the *nang so* Rgyal ba, who says: "I heard that there was a *gter ston* in Bumthang, but I never had occasion to meet you before. Now that you are here, you ought to extract a treasure that I can have confidence in."[38] At this point, it appears that Padma gling pa has been on the radar of political figures in Lha lung, but still from a distance.

It is clear from the test proposed by the *nang so* that his attitude toward Padma gling pa's presence in the area is still uncertain. He asks Padma gling pa to retrieve a treasure at a site previously prophesied by Rdo rje gling pa and Gu ru chos dbang. In order to prevent any sleight of hand, Padma gling pa is forced to change into someone else's clothes at the top of the cliff, prior to being lowered by a rope to retrieve the treasure. After Padma gling pa is successful, the *nang so* and his son become the first to receive the blessing with the treasure casket (*gter sgrom*), a tangible expression of their conversion from skeptics into believers, and they are followed by the crowd of onlookers. Here we see clearly how the conversion of a community is enacted through the initial doubts and subsequent sanction of a local political figure.[39]

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to the village of Gle'u chung to perform a seven day *Bdud rtsi sman sgrub* and twenty-three day *dbang khrid* of the *Klong gsal* (*gsang ba snying bcud*) at the *dgon pa* there (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 136–37).

37 In this test, the *nang so* brings Padma gling pa to a site indicated in a prophecy by Rdo rje gling pa and Gu ru chos dbang. Michael Aris makes the point that this is the single time that Padma gling pa did not have control over the time and place of a discovery. See Aris (1988: 48–50) for a translation of this episode, which occurs in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 145–8.

38 *Bum thang na gter ston zhig byon 'dug zer ba thos na'ang / da phan mjal rgyu ma byung / da lan 'dir phebs pa la / nged yid ches pa'i gter gcig 'don dgos* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 145).

39 This episode is explicitly cast as a conversion scene in the autobiography. In the morning after the test, the *nang so* says to Padma gling pa: "Previously, many people gossiped. Some said that you are a charlatan and others that you are a *gter ston*. By the power of doubt, they had little confidence [in you]. Because of this, I asked you to reveal a treasure at this time. Now, all the people are filled with confidence and devotion. From today onward, you must act as my lama" (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 148).

Following this conversion scene, Padma gling pa is invited to Lha lung where he is welcomed with music and received at the *nang so* Rgyal ba's large residence.[40] This is a new scale of reception for Padma gling pa and represents a movement from fringe to centre: here from the villages in and around Lho brag to the political centre of the region at Lha lung.[41] While staying with the *nang so* Rgyal ba, Padma gling pa delivers a prophecy from a text in the *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*[42] in a device that increasingly marks Padma gling pa's meetings with dignitaries.[43] The prophecy mentions the *nang so*'s support of *gter ma* side-by-side with the flourishing of his political territory (*chab srid*), serving as a persuasive incentive for patronage.[44]

After Padma gling pa's public confirmation by the *nang so*, his proselytizing begins in earnest. At this point, we see the clearest example of a mode of dissemination in which the *gter ston* conducts rituals, both public and private, in the immediate proximity of a discovery site. Padma gling pa returns to the lion-faced cliff in Sman mdo to retrieve two more treasures—the *Rta mgrin yang gsang bla med*[45] and *Phur ba yang gsang bla med*—and then immediately circles the area in and

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40 *PLTC* Vol. 14: 148.

41 On the political place of Lha lung in relation to Lho brag as a whole and Bumthang in particular, see Aris 1988: 69–71 and Pommaret 2003: 83–124.

42 The principal treasure from which Padma gling pa draws his prophecies, as sited in the autobiography, is the *Kun gsal me long*, a text included in the *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho* (*PLTC* Vol. 1: 19–138), discovered at Sman mdo in Lho brag. Michael Aris analyzes the basic format of the prophecies delivered to patrons in *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (1988: 71–72).

43 Prophecies, found within treasure cycles, provide the narrative content to link the past with the present at a particular site and among specific individuals in the community. They have a direct bearing on the discovery site, and the figures highlighted are often local religious and political dignitaries. For example, in the *lo rgyus* for the *Tshe khrid rdo rje'i phreng ba*, revealed from Sman mdo in Lho brag, though six destined disciples are mentioned in a special phase of the transmission process that seems to be particular to Padma gling pa's treasure cycles, the 'transmission of yogic accomplishment' (*grub thob rnal 'byor brgyud*), only one of them is highlighted: *khyad par Lho brag phyogs nas ni / Bsod nams ming can Mkha' ri' mgul du 'khrung*. The highlighted figure is one named Bsod nams (a.k.a. Bsod nams lhun grub) from Lho brag, who was born on the slopes of Mkha' ri (on the border between Lho brag and Mon). This figure plays a special role in Padma gling pa's early career as the first in Lho brag to accept him as a genuine *gter ston* and who continues to be a loyal supporter as his career unfolds. See *Lo rgyus rin chen spung ba* (*PLTC* Vol. 8: 11–24).

44 Padma gling pa notes that this prophecy inspires devotion and faith in the *nang so* to act as his patron. For the details of the prophecy, see *PLTC* Vol. 14: 149–50.

45 *Rta mgrin yang gsang bla med* may refer to a series of texts incorporated into the *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*, for example, *Rta mgrin yang gsang bla med kyi dbang bshad* (*PLTC* Vol. 2: 125–31) and *Rta mgrin gyi dbang chog padma'i phreng ba* (133–49).

around Sman thang giving public initiations (*khrom dbang*) at multiple sites in close proximity to one another and also a private *Rta mgrin dmar po* initiation to Bla ma Bsod nams lhun grub and his students at Rdza lung dgon pa.[46] In this case, we see Padma gling pa disseminating his treasures at predominantly public events within a circumscribed area subsequent to a discovery.

During this period, Padma gling pa also conducts ceremonies *en route* between major destinations, not only during his frequent trips between Bumthang and Lho brag, but also when invited to call on wealthier patrons from farther afield. This is important to understanding how Padma gling pa builds a popular base as a charismatic figure in the region. For example, along the route to visit Chos rgyal lhun po, the residence of Bkra shis dar rgyas[47] in Tibet's Lo ro district,[48] Padma gling pa gives instructions and performs rituals through what is now eastern Bhutan, taking a full month to travel what would normally be a twenty-day trip.[49] Consistently, he demonstrates a willingness to give instructions to nobles and nomads alike, to important lamas and also the many nuns in charge of small temples, to large crowds of ordinary

More likely, it refers to a separate treasure, entitled *Rta mgrin dmar po Dregs pa zil gon* (*PLTC* Vol. 12: 169–237), which matches the description of the empowerment given to Bsod nams lhun grub below and consists of a single text.

46 He performs a public initiation ceremony at the base of the valley and then goes to the upper valley to bestow the *Rta mgrin dmar po* initiation to Bsod nams lhun grub and his students at Rdza lung dgon pa. The next morning, he gives a public initiation in upper Sman thang and later proceeds to Grong gsar in Sman thang under the sponsorship of Bsam 'grub to perform another. Next, he goes to Btsug rna, also in Sman thang, to conduct yet another *khrom dbang* attended by the local populace with the relatives of Bla ma Kun dga' chos 'grub acting as sponsors. He discovers another treasure in the area, followed by hail and a windstorm, which Padma gling pa pacifies by commanding (*bka' bsgo*) the *gter bdag* G.ya bdud nag po. He also visits and gives initiations at the area above the upper end of Sman thang and then to the apex of the valley.

47 Michael Aris identifies Bkra shis dar rgyas as "the famous myriarch of the Ja district". For a complete account of Padma gling pa's visit to Lo ro, see *Hidden Treasure and Secret Lives* (1988: 72–75). This visit can be found in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 194–98.

48 While in Lo ro as the guest of Bkra shis dar rgyas, Padma gling pa bestows the initiation and reading transmission (*dpe lung*) for the *Drag po yang gsang bla med* revealed from Sku rjes in Bumthang and also presents the complete cycle as a gift to his host (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 198). It is important to note that the gift of a text (*dpe cha*) seems to be a mode of dissemination reserved for esteemed dignitaries. Otherwise, the dissemination process focuses on the giving of sacred objects and the initiation of individuals into ritual cycles. Also, we see that treasure cycles retain their associations to their discovery site even as they are disseminated more widely. Here the text chosen to present to the myriarch is one associated with a well-known site of Padmasambhava's activities.

49 This is according to Padma gling pa's own reckoning (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 196).

folk and to small groups of ecclesiastic disciples. Moreover, he notes the humble gifts of butter and yogurt from yak herders after a night under the stars with the same attention to detail as he enumerates the lavish gifts received from Bkra shis dar rgyas.[50] Importantly, as his career takes him farther afield, Padma gling pa becomes increasingly identified with his homeland.[51]

Consolidation Process in Later Career

Padma gling pa's discovery at Bsam yas Mchims phu in 1487 marks an end point and pinnacle in the progression of sites from Bumthang northward.[52] It represents the moment when Padma gling pa reaches the place most famous for Padmasambhava's demon-taming activities.[53] This moment also registers a transition in the overarching pattern of dissemination; from this point onward Padma gling pa consolidates his domain of conversion regionally rather than continuing to expand it into central Tibet. Indeed, his next discovery involves the hidden land of Khan pa lung, situated between Bumthang and Lho brag,[54] followed by other discoveries in the area.[55]

[50] These include gilded statues, gold coins, turquoise, porcelain, among other gifts including a horse (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 197–8).

[51] Padma gling pa is referred to as 'the Bum thang *gter ston*' in the prophecy by a Kong pa bla ma, that prompted his invitation to Lo ro (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 196).

[52] This discovery is certainly a breakthrough into a new threshold geographically. Moreover, it is treated with emphasis in a comparable way to other 'first' in Padma gling pa's autobiography through the extension of the narrative. It is one of only three occasions in the autobiography where Padma gling pa provides an extensive discovery account. Each of these three represents a 'first' of sorts: his earliest discovery at Sna rings brag just down the valley from his hometown in Chal (PLTC Vol. 14: 57–66); his initial discovery in Lho brag of the Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho (132–44); and his first and only discovery north of Lho brag (204–14). Each takes up more than ten pages, extending the account of the discovery moment itself with visions, songs, and supplications to provide narrative emphasis. Even his dramatic test at Me 'bar mtsho, likely the most famous and widely recounted episode from Padma gling pa's autobiography takes up one side of a single folio in its written form (67). Each of what I identify as the three main threshold moments functions to parse the major phases of his life which otherwise might seem as relentless series of details.

[53] For more about the legendary role of Padmasambhava in the construction of Bsam yas and the taming of gods and demons, see Kapstein 2000 and Blondeau 1971.

[54] For a detailed account of this, see Michael Aris, *Bhutan* (1979: 61–62) and Aris 1988: 67. In Padma gling pa's autobiography, the episode can be found in *PLTC* Vol. 14: 230–33.

In many ways, Padma gling pa's discovery at Bsam yas Mchims phu defies the dissemination modes identified so far. Unlike other threshold discoveries where Padma gling pa breaks new ground, no crowd of onlookers gathers and no one publicly challenges him. By contrast, he calls this a 'secret treasure' (*gsang gter*) and expresses concern that anyone knows of it.[56] The discovery is made surreptitiously at midnight after the guardian deity of Bsam yas, Pe kar,[57] comes to him in a dream to say "the time is ripe". And his party leaves quickly the next morning.[58] Strikingly, Padma gling pa refrains from disseminating this treasure in the immediate vicinity of the discovery site.[59] In this regard, the Bsam yas Mchims phu treasure, though certainly an extension into new terrain and an indexical shift in terms of the site's symbolic importance and centrality, does not function to open a new area to proselytising.

Instead, Padma gling pa returns quickly to Lho brag with his bounty and immediately confers the blessings of the treasure casket in public occasions, hosted by each of his main supporters in the region.[60] Notably, the treasure as relic with its potent association to Bsam yas Mchims phu takes on newfound importance in the dissemination

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55 Examples include Mon mkhar, a day's journey from Sman thang, and Rdo rje brag, a day's journey from Bya dkar. Padma gling pa gives a detailed account of the ritual actions proceeding a discovery at Mon mkhar in 1489. This is a public discovery (*khrom gter*) and Padma gling pa takes a moment after supplicating the Three Jewels to explain the manner in which Padmasambhava hid the treasure and the manner in which the aspiration prayer and empowerment were conferred on Padma gling pa in a previous lifetime. He then proceeds to offer *gtor ma* to the *gter bdag*, issuing a command (reminiscent of Padmasmabhava's own). Padma gling pa further mentions supplicating Padmasambhava while visualising him on the head before falling into a trance. For details, see *PLTC* Vol. 14: 236. This site is not to be confused with Mon 'gar in southeast Bhutan.

56 *Gsang gter yin pas / kun gyis shes kyi dogs / gtsug lag khang rnams kyang mjal long med par myur du 'ongs* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 213).

57 Padma gling pa and his group make offerings and supplications to three deities at this site, namely Brag btsan, Klu sman, and Pe kar (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 212). For a discussion of the relationship between Pe kar, Zu ra ra skyes and Shel ging dkar po, see Aris, *Bhutan* (1979: 46).

58 Their party attempts a quick departure but then gets held up by a sudden storm. Padma gling pa quickly brings the protective deity responsible under control by reminding it of (Padmasambhava's) former command, and the weather clears.

59 The northbound trip takes Padma gling pa four days from Sman thang (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 205). The return trip takes only three days. There is no indication that he stops for any ceremonial occasion along the way in either direction.

60 He is hosted by his three main supporters in the regions: Bla ma (Bsod nams lhun grub) at Rdza lung dgon pa, Bla ma Ston pa at Spro gle('u) chung, and Nang so Rgyal ba and his son at Gad mdo.

process,[61] harvesting the meaning of a site through a kind of charisma of place. As such, it retains potent associations to a discovery site even as it is disseminated farther afield. Consequently, the display and opening of the treasure casket becomes the focal point of ritual occasions,[62] performing as a surrogate for the discovery moment itself. As before, sacred objects, linked to the discovery site, are distributed to patrons and other dignitaries.[63]

Though the years 1491–1497 are conspicuously absent from the autobiography,[64] Padma gling pa eventually tours with the *Dgong pa kun 'dus*,[65] also referred to as the *Mchims phu'i gter ma*,[66] conducting

61 We encounter terms like 'empowerment of the treasure casket' (*gter sgrom gyi dbang*) for the first time (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 214). Later we find the term, 'empowerment and instructions of the profound yellow scrolls' (*shog ser zab mo'i dbang khrid bskur*) in a prophecy that prompts Padma gling pa to bestow the blessings of the approximately one hundred *shog ser* along with other sacred objects to a gathering in Lha lung (234).

62 On his return from Bsam yas Mchims phu, Padma gling pa opens the casket at the assembly hall of Bla ma Ston pa in Spro gle('u) chung before bestowing an empowerment. The Tibetan phrase is: *gter sgrom zhal phye nas dbang bskur byas* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 214).

63 Padma gling pa returns to Bumthang first to catalogue the contents of the treasure casket and have the twenty-five yellow scrolls copied, before distributing the contents as gifts. To each of his patrons in Lha lung as well as the *nang so*, Padma gling pa gave the *ring bsrel* of Manjushrīmitra; to the *dpon mo* Lha legs, he gave the crown of Lha lcam (Padma gsal); to Kun thub, he gave the skull of a brahmin; to Bla ma Shakya, he gave two *tsa tsa* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 222–23).

64 On this issue, Michael Aris says, "the years between 1490 and 1497 are so muddled it seems impossible to sort them out" (*Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*, 1988: 19). However, Padma gling pa provides an almost month-by-month record of events in 1490. In the dragon month of the male iron dog year (1490), he removes a *gter ma* of turquoise from Chos 'khor lha khang (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 239). See Aris 1988: 67–68 for a description of the controversy surrounding this discovery. In the horse month, Padma gling pa stays at Kun bzang brag for the month (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 245). In the sheep month, he makes a discovery at Rdo rje brag near Thar pa gling (246). Padma Tshewang is careful to note that this is not the Thar pa gling that Klong chen rab 'byams built in the Chu smad valley of Bumthang, where Padma gling pa discovered a number of early treasures, but rather a different temple situated one day's journey south of Bya dkar. See *The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan*: *Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and its Critics* (1995: 52). Next, in the monkey month, Padma gling pa is asked to teach at a new monastery above Rin chen gling in Bam rin (251). In the sow month, he gives an empowerment and instructions (*dbang khrid*) on the *Dgongs pa kun 'dus* to a lama from La stod spu rangs along with his five students (252). The next date on the same page is the dragon month of the horse year (1498), when the Lha lung *nang so* requests his presence in Lho brag.

65 This is the title of the treasure revealed from Bsam yas Mchims phu as referred to in the autobiography. In the present edition of the *Pad gling gter chos*, the title is *Rdzogs chen kun bzang dgong 'dus*, and it occupies Volumes 4 and 15. Padma gling pa conducts longer training sessions (approximately twenty days in duration) in the *Dgong*

rituals along a well-established circuit and returning to the many places where he already had cultivated communities of followers. Here it is important to note that Padma gling pa uses Lha lung as a base for side trips in the area and consolidates his following by making multiple visits to the same location.

From this point onward Padma gling pa meets some of the prominent figures of his day, notably the Seventh Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho in 1503. In their meeting, the importance of *gter ma* as both relics and text is evident. Interestingly, Chos grags rgya mtsho inquires if Padma gling pa brought three things with him: the *bka' lung, shog ser* and *dam rdzas*. This shows an equal concern with receiving the blessings from the *gter ma* as relic as it does with receiving the authorisation for treasure cycles as texts. The distinct materiality involved in the dissemination process, featuring the gifting of sacred objects, is complemented by a focus on the proper mode of disseminating texts through a stage-by-stage empowerment (*dbang*) and authorisation (*bka' lung*).[67] Significantly, Padma gling pa declines to accompany the Seventh Karma pa to Lhasa, due to the construction of a *lha khang* in Bumthang, thereby choosing consolidation at home over further expansion abroad.[68]

The consolidation process begins in earnest from 1501 onwards with the building of Gtam zhing.[69] This is a major transition point in Padma gling pa's life, when his own local residence is shifted from the peripheral location of Padma gling in the Stang valley to a central location in Chos 'khor. The process from start to finish involves the whole community. It begins with a meeting of local leaders, prompted by Padma

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pa kun 'dus at both Pema gling and Lha lung (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 258–59).

[66] Often Padma gling pa's treasure cycles retain their associations to their discovery site even as they are disseminated more widely.

[67] The *shog ser* function here as both relic and text. For the Seventh Karma pa, Padma gling pa bestowed the account of the lineage transmission, stage by stage, to the words of empowerment for five cycles in a single evening: (1) *Dgongs pa kun 'dus*, (2) *Klong gsal*, (3) *Mun sel sgron me*, (4) *Bla ma drag po*, and (5) *Nor bu rgya mtsho* with the *Lung bstan kun gsal med long* listed separately. For a translation of this event, see Aris, *Hidden Teachings and Secret Lives* (1988: 77–78). In Padma gling pa's autobiography, see *PLTC* Vol. 14: 291–95.

[68] Though we can never be sure that this invitation was indeed made and refused, the placement of it at this point in the narrative signifies Padma gling pa's commitment to consolidate his sphere of influence locally rather than attempt to expand it to another threshold.

[69] The full name is Gtam zhing Lhun grub chos gling. See note 5 above.

gling pa's patron, the *dpon po* Kun thub,[70] where the decision is made to build at Gtam zhing with the participation of local residents as volunteers in the construction process, both acting as labourers and providing food and shelter to visiting artisans from Tibet.[71] This community decision and volunteer effort are a clear sanction of Padma gling pa as a principal figure in the religious life of Bumthang. Thereafter, Gtam zhing became a hub of activity and place of congregation with its own large-scale annual gathering.[72]

Importantly, the consecration of Gtam zhing employed relics from the breadth of Padma gling pa's discoveries.[73] In a sense, the variegated terrain from which Padma gling pa drew his treasures are symbolically conjoined in a single place and concealed to consecrate the temple by their presence. The use of *gter ma* to fill the central statue of Padmasambhava is a fascinating reversal of the discovery process.[74] In this reversal, Padma gling pa consolidates a group of treasures from near and far and reconceals them. By doing so, he anchors them to Bumthang in perpetuity. In this reconfiguration of the concealment process, however, the newly concealed objects are permanently marked by their association to Padma gling pa.[75]

Padma gling pa continues to travel, though predominantly within the area of his by now well-established regional influence. His second trip to Bsam yas in 1513 is one of few occasions in which he disseminated

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[70] Padma gling pa's longtime patron, *Dpon po* Kun thub, suggests the idea as follows: "Master, for someone like you, a place like this is not large enough for your activities of conversion. With common labour, let us build you a proper temple in upper or lower Chos 'khor" (*Chos rje khyed lta bu'i gdul bya phrin las de tsam la / sa cha 'di min pa'i yangs pa zhig tu / gtsug lag khang drag pa zhig bzhengs pa drag / las mi yang Chos 'khor gyi gling stod smad la bskul bar byed, PLTC* Vol. 14: 280–81).

[71] See Michael Aris 1988c for more details.

[72] For the consecration itself, Padma gling pa mentions that many lamas from all directions gathered with their students. In addition, many from Tibet attended the festivities including a *'chams* which Padma gling pa received in a dream the previous night. This was followed by twenty-five days of instruction in the *Dgongs pa kun 'dus*, consisting of the tripartite sequence of textual dissemination: *dbang, khrid* and *dpe lung* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 309–10). The annual gathering at Gtam zhing is mentioned considerably later in the autobiography (441).

[73] The discovery site associated with each item is listed in the autobiography.

[74] This group of relics covers the three main zones of Padma gling pa's discoveries: Bumthang, Lho brag, and Bsam yas Mchims phu.

[75] Moreover, the temple of Gtam zhing was itself a representation of Padma gling pa, as noted by Michael Aris 1988c. The building was constructed according to the measurements of his own body, executed according to a schedule synchronised with his astrological chart, and covered in paintings of the deities important to his treasure cycles (with iconography idiosyncratic to them), and even depicted his own pure land.

his treasures in central Tibet,[76] bestowing them privately at the request of numerous lamas (rather than in public events). In limited stops along the way, Padma gling pa develops loyal followings in (Lho) Stag lung and Sna dkar rtse and returns to both several times.[77] As such, they represent a late augmentation to his domain of conversion, just north of Lho brag, and the only major expansion that was not accompanied by the discovery of a treasure.

During the last ten years of his life, Padma gling pa presides over large-scale ritual occasions involving thousands of participants in several principal locations, including Bumthang, Lha lung, Gnas, (Lho) Stag lung, and Sna dkar rtse. At each, he conducts extensive rituals and festivities, conducive for participants travelling great distances. These events are often two-tiered, gathering several hundred ecclesiastics and dignitaries from diverse provinces of Tibet for a *sgrub chen*,[78] followed by a blessing ceremony attended by thousands from the surrounding area.[79] These events were also sometimes accompanied by a reading of his autobiography as well as the authorisation for a series of treasures. The importance of direct contact with his treasures through the senses is emphasised, regarding the recitation of texts and encounters with sacred objects.[80]

During his lifetime, Padma gling pa gained and consolidated regional importance through the discovery and dissemination of his treasures.[81] Yet he always returned to his homeland, Bumthang, and this is the key to understanding his enduring legacy. There his own relics were enshrined at Gtam zhing. The subsequent shifting of his relics in the seventeenth century to the new capital at Spu na kha rdzong[82] and the

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76 His travels elsewhere in Tibet, for example, his trip to Rgyal rtse in 1511, were purposeful and brief, and he refrains from performing rituals along the way.

77 Padma gling pa only stops *en route* in three major sites where he is welcomed with much fanfare. These are (Lho) Stag lung, Sna dkar rtse, and Gong dkar chos sde (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 362–71).

78 The lists of lamas in attendance for these events is often given according to their region of origin.

79 For example, at Thar pa gling, approximately five hundred people are recorded to have participated in the *sgrub chen* whereas four thousand attended the events that followed (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 422–23).

80 For the emphasis on direct contact with the *gter ston* via the senses, note the phrase *zhal mthong gsung thos phyag gis reg pas / 'brel tshad don dang ldan byas* (*PLTC* Vol. 14: 412).

81 Padma gling pa concentrated his efforts regionally: from Bumthang to Lho brag and to a lesser extent eastward as his travels took him. Indeed, he rarely ventured west of the Black Mountains, though his seasonal begging rounds took him regularly as far as Mang sde in today's Krong gsar dictrict.

incorporation of a number of his treasures into official rites of a newly formed nation are indications of how the Bumthang *gter ston*, as an indigenous saint, eventually became a figure of importance to the national identity of Bhutan.[83] From this, we can begin to see the importance of place in the social historical dimensions of the *gter ma* tradition.

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[82] Padma gling pa's relics were moved in the seventeenth century from Gtam zhing to Spu na kha rdzong. In a symbolic joining of east and west, they were placed alongside the remains of Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, "still today the objects of greatest veneration" (Aris 1979: 165).

[83] For a fuller sketch of Padma gling pa's legacy in Bhutan, seel Aris 1988a and my 'Introduction' to Sarah Harding, *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa* (2003).

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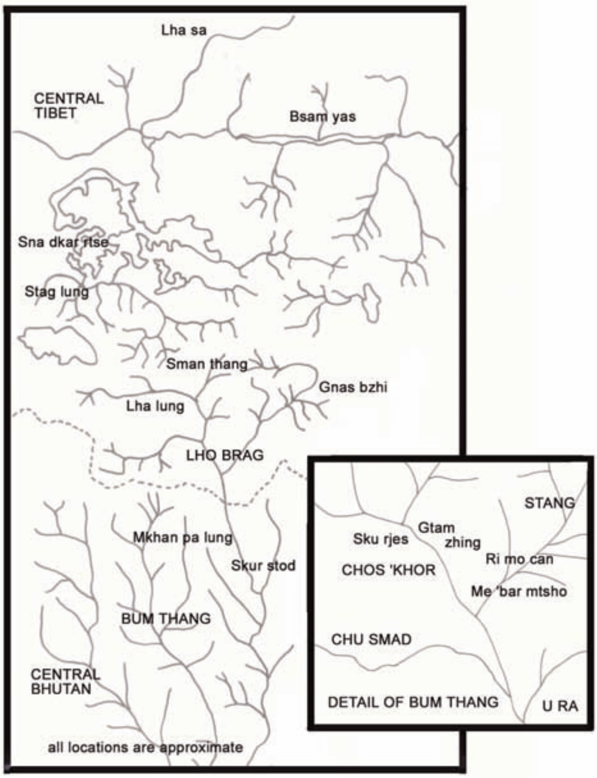
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Map 1: Map of Bumthang, Central Bhutan, in relationship to Tibet

RITUALS AND PILGRIMAGE DEVOTED TO AUM JO MO RE MA TI BY THE ’BROG PAS OF ME RAG OF EASTERN BHUTAN

Ugyen Pelgen

Background

The population known as the Brokpas (*’Brog pa*) are yak-herding nomads. Me rag (literally the ‘Fire Burnt Valley’) and the Sag steng (‘Plain of Bamboos’) have been the home of these nomads since their displacement from the southern edge of Tibet during a time frame that I am not able to specify. The Brokpas have for centuries endured the harsh life in the wilderness in settlements situated 3500 meters above sea level, tending to yak and sheep for their livelihood. Agriculture is virtually impossible and non-existent when living at such heights. Their livelihood is augmented through bartering of yak meat, cheese, butter, yak tails and products of matted bamboo baskets, winnowers and the like with their Tshangla counterparts (southern Bhutanese neighbours who engage in agriculture), in exchange for maize and paddy that add to their staple diet of cheese and milk.

The Brokpas are of Tibeto-Burman stock, which is reflected not only in their outward appearance and their dress (which is made of yak and sheep hair and covered on top with animal skin), but also in their language and social norms. “Polygyny and polyandry in the forms of fraternal and sororal are accepted norms that keep the family property and units together”.[1] Regardless of all these differences from the majority Tshangla population living in Eastern Bhutan, the Brokpas live a vibrant life with a profound sense of its own intrinsic worth. They maintain a homogenous socio-cultural category with utmost concern for their tribal polity.

Despite being strong adherents of the Dge lugs pa school of Buddhism, the earlier forms of original Bon, i.e. nature worship and animal sacrifice, still feature in their way of life. Fumigation, erecting prayer flags, consulting local priests (*phra min*s) and Buddhist priests

[1] Tamdin Dorji 1999.

are everyday-associated rituals. The highlight of their festival is the pilgrimage around Jo mo Kun mkhar: the abode of their deity *yul lha* Aum Jo mo Sman btsun Re ma ti. This festival, that begins from the 7th month of the Bhutanese calendar, is a festival in honour of this figure, who is considered their saviour and goddess. The Tshangla population also worships her, and rituals (*gsol kha*) are offered to her to solicit her help and protection.

The two areas of Me rag and Sag steng are situated in the easternmost part of the country that falls under the jurisdiction of Bkra shis sgang district. They have common borders with Rta dbang district in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. This proximity has led to close affinity between the peoples. Me rag can be approached from various points including Phong med, Ra dhi or Shong phug. A feeder road from Bkra shis sgang connects all these entry points. Sag steng can be approached from Phong med and from Me rag.

The Myth of Jo mo Re ma ti[2] and Her Iconography

The text "Rituals and Offerings in Honour of Sman btsun Re ma ti, the Guardian Deity of Eastern Bhutan",[3] authored by the late Dil go Mkhyen brtse Rin po che (1910–1991), in three folios, gives the following narration of her origin. The guardian of the Dharma, the glorious female protector, was born out of emptiness adorned with the glory of the universe. Her face is like that of a young goddess garlanded with white scarves, and ornaments of tourquoise and jewels and with innumerable rays radiating from her body. She rides a white horse with wings of wind, carrying in her right hand an arrow adorned with scarves that extends human lives. In her left she carries a skull filled with various ornaments.

Since she was born to help sentient beings she manifests herself in a variety of forms including those of a mermaid, a nāga and countless beautiful girls. She resides in 108 abodes of lakes, surrounded by four warriors and millions of other deities of the three realms: *lha'i 'jig rten*

2 Also refer to Tucci 1980: 218–89 on the history of origin of Jo mo Re ma ti.

3 The text is titled as *Lho ljongs shar gyi lha sman btsun re ma ti mchod gsol gyi cho ga 'dod dgu'i 'phrin las kun stsol*. This text was prepared by late Dil go Mkhyen brtse Rin po che on the request of Drag shos Bstan 'dzin rdo rje, as indicated at the end of the text.

(gods), *klu'i 'jig rten* (nāgas), *mi'i 'jig rten* (men). She has three messengers known as A ni Jo mo Nyang, Ur ni Jo mo Nyang and Ur ni Nyang Nyur mo, all referred to as the three 'Sgrol ma' (forms of Tārā). The Brokpas further believe that her present abode, Kun mkhar, formerly belonged to one male deity known as Btsan rgod Mu khu gling. After his residence was being occupied by Jo mo Re ma ti, he shifted to a nearby lower mountain where he still resides.

It is further believed that she was once upon a time a devil who was subdued by Guru Padmasambhava and made to take an oath to protect the teachings of Lord Buddha. It is well known that in the Himalayan culture, Re ma ti is one of the aspects of Dpal ldan lha mo, as is also indicated by late Dil go Mkhyen brtse Rin po che in his ritual text.

The Myth of the Brokpas

The text called "The Origin of our Ancestors: Lineages of the Garudas", traces the roots and history of the Brokpas to Gshog bzang and 'Dab bzang,[4] two Garudas, the Kings of the Birds.[5] Later, at the time of Chos rgyal Srong btsan sgam po, the emanated minister (*sprul pa'i blon po*) Sna chen po was from their lineage and further propagated the lineage.

After a lapse of many years, a handsome boy was born from the egg of a Garuda in Yang le shod, a cave in Nepal. This extraordinarily handsome boy was named as Bya khri gzig. He was in turn blessed with four sons of whom the eldest and most brilliant was Dge shes gsal togs can, who was also addressed as Bya dkar (White Bird) after his being always dressed in white cloth. The next was Dngul togs can, who was also referred to as Bya Khra, 'Dressed in Many-Coloured Cloth'. The two youngest brothers were known as Bya nag after their garments of black cloth. They were referred to as Bya dkar Bya nag khra gsum, 'White Bird, Black Bird, and Colourful One'.

From the two younger brothers were born three sons. One went to Bya ra, the other to Lo ra and the third, called Chos rgyal dpal bzang,

4 I refer to the text *Rang re'i pha mes kyi 'byung khungs mkha' lding khyung gi gdung rabs cung zad brjod par bya ba* narrated by Blo bzang dge 'dun written by the Mon pa monks. It is further mentioned that this text was taken out from another, anonymous text named *'Dul ba lung kha dum pa*. The text is in 13 folios.

5 A mythical story that stands close to the mythical descent of the earlier Tibetan kings.

went to Gnyal. It was around this time that Tibet was attacked by the people of Hor and was destroyed. It was prophesied by Spu gri bskor gsum that if he could build a palace on the face of a steep cliff, like that of a mirror, then the war would be over and the Tibetans would be saved from the onslaught of the people of Hor. But Chos rgyal dpal bzang failed in his mission of building a palace and went to another cliff known as Gal dai cliff. There, he dressed himself in black robes and danced before the advancing army of Hor. Their general named Tsang Po was killed, the soldiers fled and the war came to an end. Then, from one of the three brothers, was born A mi Bya nag chen po, a great practitioner endowed with great supernatural powers. He went to the cliff and built a palace, which Chos rgyal dpal bzang had failed to do.

After him came Bya Bkra shis dar, who was able to consolidate the works of his predecessors, and the kingdom flourished. He established a lineage in the south of Tibet known as Bya nag Rna dum, who made offerings to Rgyal ba Karma Pag gzhi (1204–1283), the 2nd in the line of Kar ma pas. At the time of King G.ya' bzang of Tsona (*mtsho sna*) in the south of Tibet, the Brokpas were faced with the dilemma of having to remove a whole mountain that blocked the sunrays from falling on the palace. It was at this time that a woman with a child on her back gave them the suggestion to kill the king rather than remove the mountain. This lady was none other than Jo mo Re ma ti. Having carried out the execution the Brokpas began their search for a new homeland. Bla ma Bya ras pa[6] advised them to seek the blessings of Jo mo Re ma ti for their safe journey. It was thus that these people reached their present settlement of Me rag and Sag steng. The history in this context does not mention any account of how she became their deity.

This view is also supported in the writings of *Drag shos* Bstan 'dzin rdo rje in his book *The Origin of Kings in Eastern Bhutan*[7] (159–64) who also traces the origin of the Brokpas to the Bya nag kings named Gshog bzang and 'Dab bzang of Mang yul ljongs, in the lower valleys of Yar klungs in central Tibet. From the lineage of Bya nag was born in the 13th century (third *rab byung*) Rna dum, who offered to Rgyal ba

[6] Lama Blo gros rgya mtsho, alias Nag seng, was the reincarnation of Lama Bya ras pa who established the present monastery/rdzong at Tawang (Rta dbang). He fled to Tawang during the eastern military campaign launched by the 3rd 'Brug sde srid Chos rgyal Mi 'gyur brtan pa, in the mid 17th century.

[7] The unpublished text is titled *'Brug shar phyogs su rje dpon byung rabs blo gsar byis pa dga' ba'i rna rgyan.*

Kar ma Pag gzhis a bowl of gold dust with his right ear placed on top. This ear made three sounds and hence he came to be known as *grub thob*, the Great Siddha Rna dum. His son was Bya Don grub, whose son was lama Bya ras pa and his line continued till the present lamas of Me rag. He further states that the Brokpa lineages were known as *Kom rlon rog gsum.*

Ritual Specialists Amongst Brokpas

There are three types of ritual specialists that perform amongst the Brokpas. First in order are the non-celibate village priests, called *sgom chen* in Bhutan, who are also addressed as *chos pa* (religious persons). Other specialists include *phra min* and the *dpa' bo* and *dpa' mo*, also known as *jo mo*.[8]

The *chos pa* are associated with the Dge lugs,[9] one of the three Buddhist schools that are professed in Bhutan. Dge lugs traditions are only followed by the Brokpas, and not by any other Bhutanese. The other two Buddhist schools, Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud, are officially recognised by the government. Because of their close relations with the Monpa of Tawang, people from across the border, the influence has been so great that the Dge lugs school made its inroads into Me rag and Sag steng in the 14th century, and since then flourished with the establishment of a monastery called as Sku gzhu dgon pa in Sag steng village. The monastery's foundation was laid down by a Tibetan Dge lugs Lama, Blo gros rgya mtsho. The two-storeyed monastery houses the *sku gdung* of the founder, statues of two reincarnate lamas of the

[8] *Jo mo* is a widely used term, always referring to females. This is a feature that prevails almost everywhere in Bhutan. The *dpa' bo* are male and referred to by the same name throughout the kingdom.

[9] The Dge lugs school first came to Bhutan in the 14th century and was spread by 'Phan yul ba Dpal ldan rdo rje, a disciple of Rgyal ba Tsong kha pa. While he was instrumental in spreading this school in parts of westen Bhutan including Mgar sa, it was spread in eastern Bhutan by Blo bzang bstan pa'i sgron me. 'Chi med rab rgyas, an abbot of the Gnas rnying pa and a disciple of Tsong kha pa, brought the Gnas rnying monastery into the fold of Dge lugs pa and extended it's influence south of Bhutan as well. He is claimed to have founded a number of monasteries in western Bhutan including Nags mo che rdzong, Gal stengs Glang ma nang in Wang, Dpal ri dgon pa in Cang, Lcags zam Tog kha in Spa gro, Dkar sbe Bya sreg rdzong, Sa dmar rdzing kha, Tsha li dgon pa, Bar pa lha khang and Wang Glang ma lung in Thim phug, Bar grong Bye ma'i Rdzong, Gyang dmar po and Bar grong dbang sa in Spu na kha. Today they have been brought into the fold of 'Brug pa Bka' brgyud pa and Rnying ma pa schools.

founder, and a set of *Bstan 'gyur*. A statue of Jo bo Dpal ldan lha mo also features as the main protecting deity.

The *phra min*, as they are addressed by the villagers, are in fact Bon practitioners. The other name by which a Bon practitioner in Bhutan is referred to is *bon po*. As is the case with many other traditions prevailing in Bhutan, Bon has also survived despite the onslaught and the rival factions amongst various Buddhist schools. This rivalry that continued till the mid-17th century has not been able to put an end to and totally wipe out Bon religious tradition. A number of Bon monasteries now in ruins can still be seen in various places in both Me rag and Sag steng.[10] Amongst the surviving Bon practices in Me rag and Sag steng is a dance known as 'Aar Pha'. The *Phra min* is generally associated with Bon rituals such as attending to the invocation of the supernatural beings to help cure the sick and the afflicted.

The *dpa' bo* and *dpa' mo* are male and female shamans who in times of need, like sickness, are invited to perform rituals. The *dpa' mo* is also known as *jo mo*. It is believed that they go into a kind of trance when the deity, in this case Jo mo Re ma ti herself, enters their body. The spirit then prophesises the cause of the sickness and offers details about various rituals to be performed as a cure.

While the ritual specialists can be broadly classified into these three, there exists a cordial harmony between them, and at times their responsibilities and duties may extend in the absence of any one practitioner. This is more evident in the duties performed by the *chos pa* and the *phra min*. But as far as the household rituals are concerned it is mainly the *chos pa* who takes precedence over the others. This is also true while performing rituals propitiating the deity herself.

The Rituals

The regular rituals performed in respect of Aum Jo mo, as the deity is known to the villagers, are the *gter* (treasure ritual) held in the village of Me rag and the pilgrimage to the mount Kun mkhar. These are performed by every household. The treasure ritual is performed just above

[10] The ruins of the Bon establishments can be seen in Borong sha, Pusa tsher dga', Rgyab dgon pa and Nag steng sog po dge shes. The biggest of all these are the still visible ruins at Rgyab dgon pa. Withour any archaeological expeditions, one cannot at the moment ascertain the history or much of the traditions associated with these Bon establishments.

the village where large numbers of boulders designated as *gter* can be seen, and are considered to have been left by Aum Jo mo. However the ritual is conducted near the biggest boulder of all, which is protected. Aum Jo mo is believed to have spent some time there before leaving for her final abode. The ritual is performed whenever people are sick, through *gser skyems* ritual and prostrations. In times of drought it is the whole community who gather there and offer *bsang* in order to get rain.

The pilgrimage to the abode Kun mkhar usually takes place once a year starting from the 15th day of the 7th month till the 15th day of the 8th month. The pilgrimage is carried out by individual households or in groups of four to five households. This is according to their convenience. Most family members prefer undertaking the visit in groups, to have more fun and excitement. The pilgrimage furthermore gives them an opportunity to amuse themselves and for young girls and boys to socialise.

Preparations

Although their Tshangla neighbours percieved them as a simple herding community, they have their own ways of accomplishing things and conducting rituals and events comparable to their Tshang la neighbours. The preparations range from brewing of *ara* (distilled alcohol made of grains) to weaving new clothes, decorating horses, purchasing prayer flags and designing flag poles.

The Abode and Songs in Reverence of Jo mo Re ma ti

The abode of Aum Jo mo is an object of veneration and pilgrimage. It forms a part of a large mountain range on the south east of the Me rag village that can be seen in the distance on a clear day.

The Brokpas have quite a few songs composed in praise and dedication to Aum Jo mo that are sung on every religious and secular observation that they celebrate. The womenfolk and the maiden girls on their way home sing several songs after visiting the abode and paying reverence. Among these songs,[11] one is accompanied by the stamping on the

[11] I am grateful to the students of Me rag Lower Secondary School for allowing me to record this particular song and many more.

feet of any male who stands in their way, not because of any ill feeling but because everyone is in a festive mood.

In crossing one pass from the other,
I have crossed the Dong ko la pass.

The male white horse
Is adorned with ringing chimes.

On reaching the Gor gor pass
A cry of a human, animal, or that of a chicken is to be made.

The one that resides on the sacred peak of all peaks
Is the sanctified Aum Jo mo.

To her right
Is the male shaman.

To her left
Is the female shaman.

The one that resides on the summit of three peaks
Is the revered Aum Jo mo.

Circumambulate from right to left
One is liberated of all sins.

Circumambulate from left to right
One is freed from all misdeeds.

This song in particular talks of the various passes that they endure on their journey to the abode and of the sounds that one has to utter on reaching the Gor gor pass. It also describes the features of Aum Jo mo and of the cleansing power if one makes an attempt to reach the abode.

Besides songs in praise of the deities as reflected above, the Brokpas also have a rich collection of songs that are dedicated to nature, to youth, old age, and for occasions like marriage and in praise of their land, and other raptuorous songs that one often hears them sing while tending yaks by the meadows and in the wilderness. The other way of entertaining themselves during the night halt at the abode is what is known as *khab shu,* a four-line verse that is popular among them. This style of alternating song is also popular among the people of western Bhutan but does not feature in the traditions of the Tshanglas. The general feature is that the boys and girls group themselves and compete against each other. I have tried to translate a few of the songs below.

The pillar has been erected
The knife has been whetted;

The one daring to compete with [us]
Land yourself on the tip of the knife.

Get me an arrow from the right
A bow from the left;
The deer on the meadows
Surely has no escape.

On top of the sandal wood
Rests the wicked owl;
Get me fiery iron tongs
The owl has to be sacrificed.

Far afield in the dense forests
Is laid a black vase;
To possess it is not worth the care
If beaten it doesn't create an echo.

On the highlands up above
I hear the golden trumpet;
I cannot discern the trumpeter
But the notes sadden me.

On the plains of the white trail
Is a race between the white horse and the white man;
Endearing and delightful man of my feeling
Mount the white horse.

The contest usually begins defiantly as expressed in the first verse where one group of contenders invites the other group to risk the competition. But it is a common attribute to observe that such competition always ends with a happy note where the two sides reconcile.

The Pilgrimage

The family has everything set ready by the evening of the 14th day of the 7th month. Very early the next morning they start on the journey. The pilgrims are sent off by the neighbours, relatives and well-wishers who stay behind. They gather in a wide plain not far from the village where a small chorten stands. *Ara* known as *skyel chang,* brought by the friends and relatives, is served here. From here they begin their journey on their own with males riding their horses and females and young boys and girls following close at heels.

Not far from the village they reach a stream where the pilgrims splash each other in the water, signifying leaving behind all their rela-

tions. With this short formal celebration over they continue with their journey and tease each other, often throwing abusive remarks at each other till they reach a wide meadow known as *Rta rgyugs thang*, 'racing plain'. Here they have their packed lunch and then, before heading on, they conduct a horse race. This particular event is in honour of Aum Jo mo's horse which is believed to have been tied to a stone somewhere in the plain. With the race over they continue with their climb further up towards the Dong ko la pass.

Dong ko la is the first pass that they cross. On reaching the pass they offer *bsang*. Juniper leaves that grow in abundance there are cut for the purpose. Further up they they reach Khri gtsang, a pool blessed by the deity. Like her they plunge in the pool and cleanse themselves of their dirt both literally and honorifically. Leaving the pool behind they climb further up towards the second and the last pass, the Go go la mo. First comers or people on their first visit will either have to sing or make a sound of an animal or a bird's cry in praise of the deity.

Further up as they almost reach the summit of Kun mkhar they reach Bla gtsang where they camp for the night. Women are not allowed to go any further. Early the next morning men folk get ready to scale to the abode. They prepare the prayer flags to be erected and the offerings to be made. The abode itself is rocky and narrow and one has to be sure-footed to stay alive and join others in the propitiation ceremony. While men folk start for the summit, women and others who do not join the men make their own offerings. An altar for the purpose is made and offerings are laid that they have prepared and carried on their backs. Prayers for well being, good luck and for prosperity are said along with those for their animals—the yaks, sheep and horses.

On reaching the abode the men folk erect the prayer flag, and make an offering of *bsang*, the *chos pa* conducting *lha bsang* and *gser skyems*. The ritual text is also read out. At times, when time does not permit, they first read out the abbreviated format that is in four lines. After this they circumambulate the summit. As they do so they shout "*Lha rgyal lo*" at tops of their voices in praise of their deity, which means "let the gods always come out victorious!"

The next day the pilgrims return to their village following the same route. And as they come home they sing numerous songs as the one described above. While singing they stamp on each other's feet. On nearing the village they are once again welcomed by the village elders, relatives and friends with *pa langs*[12] of *ara*.

Lha gsol at Home

Besides undertaking pilgrimage to the abode of Jo mo Re ma ti, they also perform *Lha gsol* in their repective houses. This is an individual performance and conducted once every year as is the case throughout Bhutan.[13] In Me rag and Sag steng regions, the ritual text also differs, but one ritual is however carried out in honour of Jo mo Re ma ti. The text is the one mentioned below.

The Invitation

The glorious female guardian Re ma ti,
Born out of emptiness and the protectoress of the Dharma of Lord Buddha.
The one known by hundred and thousands of names,
Each having a different form,
The chief protecting deity of the glorious Kingdom of medicinal herbs.
Re ma ti, the mother of all protecting deities,
Encircled by hundreds of male and female protectors,
Encompassed by one hundred thousand demons of the three worlds.
Welcome to the place of worship
With compassion and love.
We invite you with all good music
And with colourful scarves,
As pledged before Padmasambhava,
We request your presence with faith and compassion.

Offerings

We offer before you the purified beings of this universe,
Elaborate palaces adorned with ornaments and jewels.
A lotus with the sun and the moon placed on it,
Demi-gods are requested to be seated on these offerings.
With all these attractive offerings,
Including wealth of the three realms of gods,
The mother earth and the entire universe.
Offerings of forms, pleasant smell and sounds,

[12] A cylindrical wooden container used for storing and carrying *ara*.
[13] The context of the ritual varies from one household to the other and from one locality and region to the other. This is due to the existence of various deities.

Silken cloth, palaces of jewels and ornaments,
Wish-fulfilling cows and treasured vases,
Birds with beautiful tunes,
We offer all these as vast as the sky and the earth.
Wash away all our sins,
And protect us from all,
Endowing us with good luck and fulfilling wishes.

The abbreviated version of the ritual contains only four lines and is, as mentioned earlier, normally read out when time presses on. It goes as follows:

Born from the emptiness of the mandala (*dkyil 'khor*)
The only mother Jo mo Re ma ti.
Surrounded by *lha*, *klu* and *btsan*,
I offer you medicine and blood,
With all happiness take the offerings.
I seek all your protection.

Conclusion

Till very recently the people of Me rag and Sag steng had lived almost an isolated, sheltered life, entranced in their own world, almost unaffected by the policies of the Bhutanese Government. Almost a decade later, receptiveness to the developmental initiatives of the government towards bringing them into the mainstream is still received with mixed feelings. Educational opportunities were offered in the late 1980s and even today it is not a success story. The schools experience lack of students, which is not only backed by the reluctance of the parents but also by socio-economic problems. Migration patterns have also compounded this difficulty.

The mind-set of these people is nonetheless gradually changing with new policies implemented by the government, the most important being decentralisation and people's participation. A perceptible and conspicuous change, though a measured and cautious one, is the adjustment in their dress and in their living styles.

There is also a growing sense of disillusionment, among the elderly and the parents, of one day losing their identity when their children would no longer take up their dress, culture, and ways of life that have sustained them for centuries. As one Brokpa Apa remarked,

> My son was ashamed to see me when I paid him a visit at Radhi Lower Secondary School, and I was better recieved by the teachers than my own son. I don't think he will ever come back to see me if he ever gets a job in future.

It is apparent that his son felt ashamed to meet his father in his traditional attire and this strong feeling of preferring 'Tshang la dress' is reflected in every school child that I spoke to. It is as if a small and rich culture is being subsumed by the bigger world outside. As aptly remarked by Apa Leki Tshering, the role of Aum Jo mo is paramount in their life and touches their identity. In his words:

> Aum Jo mo has been our saviour and we will always look up to her as our saviour. This will be our responsibility to pass on to the coming generations. I dream of my people protecting their identity at the same time incorporating the ideas from the outside world.

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ESTATE AND DEITIES: A RITUAL FROM CENTRAL BHUTAN. THE *BSKANG GSO* OF O RGYAN CHOS GLING[1]

FRANÇOISE POMMARET

INTRODUCTION

The O rgyan chos gling estate in the Stang valley of Bum thang (central Bhutan) is associated with great Tibetan masters. Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1363) meditated here and it was one of the residences of Rdo rje gling pa (1346–1405).[2] The family that owns the estate, and has done for generations, considers itself as one of his blood descendants.

In the 19th century, the estate and the family became powerful and prosperous. The head of the lineage Mtsho skyes rdo rje, alias Dbang chen, became the governor (*dpon slob*) of Tongsa dzong (Krong gsar Chos 'khor rab brtan rtse rdzong) and the *de facto* leader of Bhutan.[3] Moreover, the marital alliances between the Rdo rje gling pa lineage and the descendants of Padma gling pa (1450–1521), the other great lay-practitioner and treasure discoverer of Bumthang, increased the religious prestige of the O rgyan chos gling family. Thus, Ye shes, the daughter of Mtsho skyes rdo rje, married 'Phrin las, the son of Gtam zhing *chos rje*.[4] Their son O rgyan rdo rje became the Bya dkar *rdzong dpon*, that is to say the head of the Bumthang district, and between 1900 and 1902 he rebuilt the family residence, which had been damaged by

1 This article is part of a series that will be published in the years to come on the estate of O rgyan chos gling. A book destined to a wider audience will also be published at a later stage with Kunzang Choden.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Kunzang Choden and her family, who enthusiastically helped me with the research on their estate, as well as all the villagers of O rgyan chos gling. Please see also Kunzang Choden's article in this volume.

This fieldwork, which is spread over several years, would not be possible without the financial assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, via the French Embassy in Delhi, which supports my History and Social Sciences programme with the University of Bhutan. All photographs are by Françoise Pommaret.

2 For Rdo rje gling pa's activities in Bhutan, see Karmay 2000.

3 I will not elaborate here on the history of Bhutan in the 19th century. See Aris 1994.

4 Descendant of Padma gling pa (1450–1521).

the 1897 earthquake. His paternal uncle was the 8th Pad gling *Gsung sprul* Kun bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma (1843–1891) and his son was Thub rtan dpal 'bar, the 9th Pad gling *Thug sras* (1906–1939).[5]

Today the estate is still in the hands of the same family, which belongs to the *chos rgyud gdung rgyud* class. In Bhutan, traditionally, families do not have names, but the collective term of *chos rgyud gdung rgyud* is applied to the social strata to which families who have both a religious and noble lineage belong. This position in a traditional feudal society implied a certain number of rights and duties that still survive today in spite of major social and economic changes in the country. Since the 1960s, without any formal or spoken agreement, the villagers and the *chos rje* family,[6] conscious of their respective leverage powers, have manoeuvred within their socio-religious and economic spaces. They constantly negotiate compromises between the traditional and the modern socio-political structures, progressing by consensus rather than confrontation.

Testimonies of the feudal and religious set-up typical of central Bhutan come to light during the annual festival of the *bskang gso*, which takes place in the autumn in O rgyan chos gling, from the 8th to the 10th day of the 9th month. In this paper a presentation of the ritual will serve as a background to explore, in the context of central Bhutan, elements of the social and religious organisation at the estate when the performance of the *bskang gso* ritual takes place.

O rgyan chos gling: a Short Presentation

At the top of a hillock with a commanding view of the Stang valley, O rgyan chos gling is composed of a large manor and twenty houses, which form the village (Plate. 1). Before the abolition of serfdom in 1953 and the 3rd King's (1928–1972) land reorganisation in the mid-1950s, the village was inhabited by serfs who worked for the very large

5 On the relations between the Bumthang noble families and the reincarnated lamas of the Pad gling lineages, see Pommaret, forthcoming.

6 In Bhutan the title *chos rje* is given to descendants of a prestigious lay-practitioner and it also implies generally the possession of a temple and of an estate (*gzhis ka*). It therefore may also carry an economic connotation, depending on the size of the estate, and before the advent of the monarchy, a local political power. In today's Bhutan, the title *chos rje* is still prestigious and is the term by which the O rgyan chos gling family is referred.

chos rje estate. Most of them stayed on after the abolition of their low status. They farm their land, own some cattle and still work occasionally for the *chos rje* family for daily wages.[7] Even prior to the 1950s, several Tibetans came down from Lho brag to O rgyan chos gling and married with local people, but, in fact, the practice of intermarriage with people from this region of Tibet may go back to a much more distant past.

The manor is one of the finest examples of civil architecture in Bhutan and as a *chos rje* family residence it is referred to by the term *sngags tshang*, although in this case it is also called a *rdzong*. At the centre of the manor is a tower (*dbu rtse*), which faces east and which is used for grain storage, as well as having residential spaces and a temple dedicated to Amitayus on the top floor.[8] In the courtyard on the north side of the central tower there is a small pavilion that was used by dancers and musicians when there was a *tshes bcu* festival; it is today converted into rooms for family guests. Still on the north side and opening to the south is a large two-storeyed building called the Jokhang: on the ground floor is a large Tara temple and a room containing a large prayer-wheel; on the first floor there is a small temple to Vajrasattva and a large temple to the Jo bo, as well as a *mgon khang* dedicated to Mgon po Ma ning and the local deities of O rgyan chos gling. The courtyard contains several chorten and a large *klu khang*. The whole complex is enclosed by a high wall, which, on the east and south sides, supports residential quarters and storerooms, the *shag skor*. The main entrance to the complex is on the east side and faces the village. On the north-eastern side, just outside the wall between the manor and the village, stands a tall prayer-flag, the *lha dar*, which is the focal point for a large part of the ritual.

The *Bskang gso* Ritual

The liturgical aspect of the ritual will not be examined in too much detail in this paper. Here I would like to examine the ritual as a community event linked to the territory and revealing socio-religious struc-

[7] The socio-economic situation of O rgyan chos gling will be examined in another paper, which will also deal with the rank order and etiquette.

[8] Since May 2001, the central tower has been converted by the family into a museum depicting life in a noble house before the 1960s.

tures. Life in O rgyan chos gling is shaped by numerous rituals but the *bskang gso* is the most important of all as it brings together, inside the manor, the *chos rje* family and the villagers in a long and complex ceremony, the organisation of which is the responsibility and duty of the *chos rje* family. Nowadays the ritual called *bskang gso* has become complex. In fact, it combines two ceremonies that existed separately before the 1970s, but during subsequent years, for socio-economic reasons, the lay-practitioners were disbanded, the power of O rgyan chos gling declined and the two ceremonies had to be merged into one, held from the 8th to the 10th day of the 9th month. Prior to this period, there was a *tshes bcu* ceremony with masked dances in the 9th month, and a *bskang gso* in the 10th month.[9] The blending of these two rituals into one explains why it was, at the beginning, very hard to comprehend the ritual.[10]

The *bskang gso* (a short form of the expression *thugs dam bskang ba nyams pa gso ba*) is generally described as a ritual of propitiation dedicated to tutelary deities and is not a ritual that finds its origin in India.[11] A. Spanien-Macdonald elaborated on its meaning and her definition applies perfectly to our ritual as we will see: "Réaliser les vœux de la divinité par les offrandes et renouveller le serment (établi jadis par un lama du passé et le dieu)".[12] The syllable *so* is important as it belongs to the semantic group meaning "to feed, to restore, to come back to life".[13]

Although the date of the ritual's introduction in O rgyan chos gling is not known, the texts used during the liturgy are by Rdo rje gling pa. The two main texts are the *Bla ma bka' 'dus rin chen gter spungs kyi las byang*, which, in the past, was read at the *tshes bcu* ceremony, and the *Dpal Mgon po Ma ning srog gi sbu tri'i las byang*, which was read at the *bskang gso* ritual.

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[9] At the occasion of the *bskang gso* a yak was sacrified but the custom was stopped by a member of the family, lama Nus ldan, in the 1950s when he came back from Smin grol gling in Tibet.

[10] It is known that a *bskang ba* is sometimes a part of a more elaborate ceremony, see Canzio 1988: 162.

[11] Riccardo Canzio writes, "Les *bskang-ba* ou les *bskang gso* sont des rituels apparemment typiques de la religion tibétaine; on ne trouve pas de rites similaires dans le bouddhisme indien. Ils s'adressent aux *dam-can*, les divinités locales soumises par des arts magiques et réinstallées comme protectrices et gardiennes de la religion. Nous avons affaire ici à des entités appartenant au fonds mythologique pré-bouddhique" (1988: 159).

[12] Spanien-Macdonald (1991–1992).

[13] Stein 1971: 484.

In O rgyan chos gling the *bskang gso* is dedicated to Mahākāla Mgon po Ma ning who was the protective deity of Rdo rje gling pa and became his descendants' deity. He is called *chos srung* by the people. On the same occasion, all the deities of O rgyan chos gling that are considered to be part of the retinue of Mgon po Ma ning are also worshipped and presented with offerings. Short texts dedicated to them and composed by Rdo rje gling pa and his descendants are included in the recitation. Some of these deities, such as Sku bla mkha' ri and Jo bo bla bdag, came from Tibet with Rdo rje gling pa and other lamas. Others, however, are indigenous, such as Shar btsan who came from eastern Bhutan with a wife for the lord in the 19th century, or Skyes bu lung btsan, the deity of Bumthang Chos 'khor who was incorporated because of O rgyan Rdo rje, who was the Bya dkar *dzong dpon* in the early 20th century. Indrabhūti is especially revered because he is the deity of the territory (*gnas po*) of O rgyan chos gling. All are now considered to be local deities and at the same time make up the *'khor* or 'entourage' of Mgon po Ma ning; their offering cakes (*gtor ma*) are placed symmetrically on each side of the *gtor ma* of Mgon po on the altar.[14]

I will not elaborate here on the deities but I must mention that Mgon po Ma ning and the deities in his entourage are perceived in O rgyan chos gling as its protectors, with a clear hierarchical rank, but are also considered to be deities of the territory. For the people, the large number of ravens in O rgyan chos gling is a sure sign of the protection of Mgon po, as they are associated with this deity. The line distinguishing between protectors and local deities is, in the context of O rgyan chos gling, blurred as Balikci notes it for the cult to Kang chen mdzod lnga in Sikkim.[15]

The religious ceremony is performed by ten to fifteen lay-practitioners, to whom must be added the family and the villagers who also play an important role. The fact that most of the lay-practitioners come either from village families or are related to them adds to the social cohesion and allows an easy interaction.

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[14] These deities are Ekajati, Gza', Srog bdud, Dam can (= Rdo rje legs pa in this case), Lha mo , Nam sras, Rgyal po (= Pe dkar in this case), Sku bla mkha' ri, *Gnas po* Indrabhūti, Jo bo la bdag, Dgon dkar klu dud Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Bstan ma bcu gnyis.

[15] Balikci-Denjongpa 2002: 20, 22, 33.

The lay-practitioners belong to the different religious categories that are found in Bhutan. Most of them are called *sgom chen*, the term for lay-practitioners in Bhutan, from the village or the surrounding areas. Ordained monks, called *dge slong* in Bhutan, also come if they are available. Finally, Pad gling Thugs sras rin po che, who is a *dge slong*, usually presides over the ritual. All belong to the Rnying ma school, except the *dbu mdzad*, who is an ex-monk (called *dge bskrad* in Dzongkha) of the 'Brug pa school. All the practitioners are paid by the *chos rje* family, which also provides food for them, except for the 2nd day of the ritual when the lunch is provided by the villagers.

The ritual appears as a juxtaposition of events and ceremonies that take place inside the Jo bo lha khang and outside near the prayer flag, and in the courtyard. When events take place outside, the religious ceremony inside the temple stops. The *chos rje* family and the villagers view the ritual as a structured ceremony and the most important event of local life. It must be carried out as correctly as possible so that the deities are propitiated. The presence of a reincarnate lama is recommended and highly regarded. Great attention is paid to the order of events and to the strict execution of the liturgy (recitation of the texts, musical parts, offerings, blessings).

However, in reality, while every event happens in the end as it should according to the 'tradition' and the "actors know their part", it is preceded and paralleled 'backstage' by utter disorganisation: there are years when for some reason the lay-practitioners may not be available, or the *rin po che* has gone away, the texts are not in order and the young lay-practitioners are desperately looking for the right passages to read; the musicians do not follow the same musical tradition; it rains and the outside events have to be shortened or moved inside the temple;[16] meat is not available for the offerings and the meals, even though meat and entrails are essential, especially for Mgon po's offerings, and it has to be brought all the way from Thimphu; the man who performs the dance to Mgon po has to go away on official duty, without mentioning the omens that may appear during the ritual and which have to be interpreted as positively as possible.

Therefore, until each element of the *bskang gso* is effectively— and seemingly miraculously—accomplished, there is a flurry of activities,

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[16] This happened in October 1999, when there was a typhoon in Bangladesh, and it rained continuously for three days.

tempers are frayed, and this is compounded by the large amount of alcohol (*a rag*) consumed by both men and women, including most of the lay-practitioners who perform the ritual. The feeling of relief of all parties when the three days are over is obvious: “Everything went well so the deities will bless O rgyan chos gling for the year to come”. The elements of the ritual, the scenario, have been correctly carried out so that the deities are content and this is what really matters.

It is the observance of the code or scenario that gives the ritual value and efficiency. Inside the framework of the scenario, the script itself is being written by the actors and can be changed or evolved according to external circumstances or the influence of a lama. This ritual could therefore be defined as a ‘fluid codification’. There could be different ways to describe the ritual, in a chronological order for example. But after witnessing the full process three times, I have come to the conclusion that its description would be best arrived at if it is presented according to the places where the activities take place. It establishes a kind of continuum in the ritual, while a simple ‘day-wise’ presentation would add to its complexity and would not bring out its specificities.

1. Ceremonies inside the Jo bo lha khang

The lay-practitioners sit in two rows perpendicular to the altar; some of them are musicians (four oboes, four drums, four bone trumpets, one conch).The *rin po che*, the *rdo rje slob dpon*, the *dbu mdzad* holding the cymbals, and the musicians playing the long trumpets sit with their backs to the window and face the altar, an arrangement that is different from many central Tibetan temples (Plate. 6). The sacristan is called the *mchod dpon* and he is a lay-practitioner from the village of O rgyan chos gling who carries out his duty very seriously. He has to co-ordinate the ceremony, perform parts of it, and also help the young lay-practitioners find the right page of the texts when they are lost.

The altar (Plate. 3) is stacked with *gtor ma*, which have been prepared by three or four lay-practitioners the day before in the Vajrasattva *lha khang* as well as on the landing of the first floor. There are two rows of *gtor ma*: the upper one consists of three elaborate *gtor ma* made according to the *bla ma bka’ ’dus* that represent the *yi dam*, the *bla ma* and the *mkha’ ’gro*; the lower row has a large *gtor ma* of Mgon po Ma ning in the centre and, on each side, eleven smaller *gtor ma* represent-

ing the protective deities of O rgyan chos gling, each different from the other and well-identified.[17] On the side of the altar, near the arrow of good fortune (*mda' dar*), there is a large *gtor ma* adorned with animal *tsakali*. This is the *dbang gtor* of Mgon po Ma ning, the one that is filled by the ritual with the power of the deity. Dozens of smaller cakes, which are food for the deities and called simply *bag tshogs* are placed in front of the larger cakes.

On each of the three days the ceremony is the same, that is to say, repeated, and on the evening of the third day it is held on a grander scale. The repetition of the ceremony for three days brings more merit and blessing. In the 1970s it had been reduced to one day by *Drag shos* O rgyan dbang 'dus, but after his death in 1988, *Drag shos* O rgyan rig 'dzin (*alias* Denma), his nephew and co-owner of the estate, reintroduced the three-day ceremony in 1990.

The ceremony starts before dawn, at about 4 a.m. The lay-practitioners read the *Bla ma bka' 'dus* text and stop just before the food offering (*tshogs*) sequence. Around 9 a.m., they have a twenty-minute rest. They then resume the ceremony, performing what they call the *chos srung* (Ma ning) *bskang gso* and they must reach the passage regarding Indrabhūti, the *gnas po/gzhi bdag* of O rgyan chos gling, at lunch time, which is about 12:30 p.m.

The lay-practitioners are the first to take their lunch in the courtyard and they sit in two rows facing each other and in a strict order. In the afternoon, the ceremony consists of offering food to the deities. It is a long sequence because, for economic reasons, the food offerings are made at the same time for the *tshes bcu* ritual with the *bla ma bka' 'dus* text, and for the *bskang gso* with the Mgon po chos srung text. This probably explains why there is no separate food-offering sequence in the morning. The ceremony concludes around 4:30 p.m. with the taking of the food offerings (*dngos grub*) and a recitation of the *bkra shis smon lam* text.

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[17] This set-up is common in the Tibetan world. See, for example, Balikci 2002: 27–28, "Looking at the Nesol altar and its inherent hierarchy, the top row represents the tantric deities who stands for Buddhism's highest and purest form which from the villagers' point of view is best understood and dealt with by the learned lamas of the monasteries and the Tibetan rinpoches. The second row of *torma* for the local deities and protectors of Sikkim as a whole are associate with the village lamas since they are the most important and tangible high deities of the land from a Sikkimese villager's perspective".

In the evening, the sacristan brings plates of *dngos grub* offerings to the *chos rje* family. The family takes part of it and then sends the rest to the helpers working in the people's kitchen and cooking for the lay-practitioners. These helpers come from the village and are fed and paid for their services.

On the third day, the ceremony in the temple starts at 1 a.m. because most of the liturgy has to be completed by lunch time, as in the afternoon important elements of the ritual take place in the courtyard.

The ending of the ceremony takes place once the afternoon events in the courtyard are over and lasts from 5 to 7 p.m. It is the *grand finale* of the invocation to Mgon po (*spyan 'dren*), to which everybody in the village tries to come, including the children, and the temple is packed with over one hundred people. The *chos rje* family and their friends or visitors sit on carpets along the eastern wall of the temple, their backs to the *mgon khang*. People from the village sit or stand at the back of the altar, and along the western wall. The sacristan has hardly any space to move about and the brightly lit candles are at risk of being knocked off by people who have had too much to drink.

The ritual resumes at the *dngos grub* sequence. First, everybody offers money to the large wrathful sacrificial cake called Mgon po *bskul gtor*, but before placing the banknote on the plate, people rub it on themselves in order to get rid of all the negative influences and obstacles (*bar chad*) of the year. Once the money is collected, the sacristan sets this *gtor ma* alight and then takes it outside the temple. Then, from all the deities' *gtor ma* on the altar, he takes out only the one representing the Bstan ma bcu gnyis.

The sacristan offers scented water (*bdud rtsi*) and alcohol to everybody. This is followed by a prayer for the blessing of a *kapāla* bowl full of scented water and a *kapāla* filled with small pills (*tshe ril dngos grub*). They have been consecrated by the lama presiding over the ritual and distributed to each participant.

Then, the sacristan gives the elaborate food offerings on plates, which have been placed on the altar since the morning, to the lay-practitioners and to each member of the family while the simple food offerings are distributed to the people. The food offerings are not eaten right there and then, but just nibbled at. The people pack the food in a piece of cloth to take back home as blessings for those who could not attend, especially small children and old people. Tea and saffron rice (*'bras*

sril) are given to the lay-practitioners, the family and all the people present in the temple. This is followed by alcohol (*a rag*).

Towards the end of the ritual, the *chos rje* family distributes envelopes containing the ritual fees to all the lay-practitioners. The amount of payment is strictly determined by order: the *Rdo rje slob dpon* receives twice what a simple lay-practitioner gets, the choir master one and a half times, and the lama *rin po che* six times as much.

The end of the ritual is signalled by the whole assembly saying the prayer of good auspices (*bkra shis smon lam*), punctuated by rice grains thrown into the air. While the lay-practitioners start to fold their books and pack their instruments, the womenfolk sing religious songs (*mgur*) in the temple. During all this part of the ritual, the atmosphere is solemn and dark. It is night but the temple is lit by hundreds of butter lamps and the lay-practitioners are chanting the liturgy to the accompaniment of all the instruments. The music is deafening and reverberates throughout the village. It is a moment when each participant feels the presence of Mgon po Ma ning. They are intimately linked to the protective deity and to each other as a community belonging to the O rgyan chos gling territory. For the villagers, it is the moment when the ancient allegiance to the *chos rje* family and to their protective deity is renewed. It is through the religious will and economic well-being of the *chos rje* family that the ceremony, which will bring them the protection of the deity, can be performed. For the *chos rje* family, it is a moment when they renew their personal allegiance to Mgon po and the ceremony confers prestige upon them: it demonstrates their religious importance and their socio-economic status to the villagers; it proves their sense of duty towards the inhabitants of the territory by pleasing Mgon po for the benefit of all; it also allows them to redistribute wealth for the well-being of the territory through the offerings, the food, the alcohol and the cash money distributed to the lay-practitioners and to the villagers helping during the ritual.

The economic importance and value of rituals have in the past often been neglected; in the case of O rgyan chos gling, the ritual would be misrepresented if this aspect was not mentioned, if only briefly.

2. Outdoor events: changing the flag, the procession and the ceremony dedicated to Mgon po

The first and second days of the ritual are dedicated to the changing of the flags on the roofs, but especially the tall *lha dar* dedicated to Mgon po Ma ning, just outside the manor (Plate. 2). It is a major undertaking as the pole (*dar shing*) is more than 30 metres high and a source of, at the same time, great concern and amusement for everybody. It is also the time when the community comes together and when the ancient social categories are revealed.

First day

About 9 o'clock in the morning, twenty men arrive from the village and are served tea and snacks. They sit along the central tower. They are the ones who will take down the *lha dar*. Around 10:30 a.m., they move outside the manor and start removing the big stones that form the base and the foundation of the flag-pole. In the mean1time, women villagers arrive and position themselves, holding thick ropes, which are used to take down the flag-pole. The ropes are made of rattan and are brought all the way from the region of Skur stod where O rgyan chos ling has land. The ropes are tied to the flag-pole by the head of all the estate workers (*la rgyab*) or somebody who has climbing skills!

There is a row of about ten women on the roof of the building nearest the flag (on the south side), a row in the courtyard (west side), a row in the pasture (east side), and a row of men folk holding the pole with crossed boards on the north side where the weight of the flag-pole is the most difficult to manage. At 11 a.m., once all the stones are cleared, the flag-pole is brought down with great care, held back by the ropes and supported by beams. Two men with a big double-faced cylindrical drum and a gong give the signals while another man shouts *'*shag*', 'come'. He is traditionally the *la rgyab*. Nowadays members of the *chos rje* family participate and join any row, but in the olden days they only watched from the windows.

As mentioned earlier, the ritual stops in the temple when the flag-pole is ready to be taken down. Six lay-practitioners climb onto the Jo bo lha khang roof with their musical instruments (*dung, rgya gling* and *rol mo*). Wearing special yellow hats (*rtse zhwa*), they play while the flag-pole goes down. It takes about twenty to thirty minutes to bring the pole to the ground.

Once the pole is on the ground, the flag is detached from it and later burnt. In the afternoon the ceremony carries on in the temple. Near the pole an old man weaves a new bamboo ornament for the top of the pole, other men prepare small poles for the flags that will go on the roofs of the manor, and two clean the long pole with a plane. All the flags are rectangular and of different colours, except the small flag for Mgon po, which is triangular, black and decorated with an eye and a skull. Called *ru dar*, it will be placed on the roof of the *mgon khang*. All the small flags, except the triangular flag of Mgon po, which is put in the *mgon khang*, are placed in front of the main altar for the night. The flags correspond to the deities that are in the *mgon khang* and include Indrabhūti and Sku bla mkha' ri. Inside the manor, the work has started has on the new 30-metre-long flag. The four auspicious animals are printed from block prints and painted: tiger, snow lion, dragon and garuda, then Avalokitesvara with eleven heads, and lastly prayers.

Second day

The new bamboo ornament and the flag are fixed to the pole with small wooden pegs. The flag is now hoisted in the late morning of the second day (Plate. 2).[18] It is the same ceremony as the day before except that erecting the flag-pole is a more difficult task. It takes more than half an hour, with a lot of shouting and pulling. Everybody is placed in the same way as the first day. In the end, the flag-pole should be straight, if not, it is a bad omen for the whole territory. The pole is then secured with the stones, which are placed at its base.

Once the flag is hoisted, a short ceremony of consecration (*rab gnas*) is performed by the lama after lunch. This ceremony can also be performed on the third day. A fire for the fumigation (*bsangs*) with pine branches is lit near the flag. The consecration ends with the ceremony of the *mar chang*, the offering of butter and alcohol to Mgon po.[19] A bamboo twig decorated with colourful ribbons is presented to the lama, who blesses it, and then it is stuck at the base of the flag-pole. Called

[18] The flag was hoisted on the 3rd day of the ritual until the late 1980s when Kro dga' ba rinpoche, a well-know Rnying ma pa lama came from Darjeeling and declared that that day was not auspicious for such an activity as it was a '*ba den khra bo*' day in the calendar.

[19] On the *mar chang* ceremony, extremely common in Bhutan and performed in almost all instances as an offering and blessing, see the cremonial manuals: *Sgrigs lam rnam gzhag gi deb ther nor bu'i 'phreng ba* (1999: 205–9); and *Sgrig lam rnam gzhag lag len* (1999: 14–19 and 159–60).

rab gnas dar shing, it is dedicated to the deities of O rgyan chos gling in the retinue of Mgon po. Men then shout in Bumthangkha "*Tai ya hi, hi, hi*" the equivalent of the Tibetan '*Ki so so*'. The barley flour that was used during the consecration ritual is placed on the head, the forehead or the neck of everybody, especially the children, as a blessing for long life.

In the afternoon of the same day, seemingly without any further ceremony, the small flags are placed on all the roofs of the manor and Mgon po's black flag above the *mgon khang*. That evening, helmets, shields, guns and some standards are taken out of the *mgon khang* and placed in front of the altar. The men who will wear these costumes on the third day are considered the servants ('*changkhab*'/ *phyag sgar pa*) of the O rgyan chos gling deities. They are villagers who volunteer to take up this role and whose parents have worked for the manor. That evening, on each of the deities' cakes, the sacristan places a little piece of dried meat.

Third day

There is no outdoor morning activities on the third day but lunch is served early, about 11 o'clock, and the lay-practitioners who started the ceremony in the temple around 1:30 a.m. have finished it.

Around midday, animals arrive: a bull, a cow, a yak and a *'bri* led by the O rgyan chos gling cattle herder's family, horses and some sheep (Plate. 4). Slowly the courtyard fills up with villagers carrying roosters and hens, and O rgyan chos gling mastiffs wear a thick collar made of red yak wool. A small yellow or red ribbon, called *rten gso srung mdud* (or **tenso run ma* in Bumthangkha, 'thread for renewing the support') is attached to the hair or feathers of each animal: it is the mark of its dedication to Mgon po.

The lama presiding over the ritual and the head of the O rgyan chos gling family, accompanied by musicians, go up to the family's private chapel in the *shag skor* and bring back a box that contains a hat believed to be that of Rdo rje gling pa. When they cross the courtyard to go back to the temple, villagers line up to be blessed on their head with the hat.

While this was taking place, male villagers have gone up into the temple and changed into their warrior outfits. There must be at least eleven, but if there are more of them, they get only parts of costumes.

They are headed by a general (*dmag dpon*) who holds the *btsan dar*, a pole with a flag made of multiple ribbons, and wears a thick red wool hat while the warriors wear helmets. As soon as the warriors have gone down to the courtyard, the lama wearing Rdo rje gling pa's hat stands on the throne and, while performing the ritual, watches the events in the courtyard through the window.

In the courtyard, a fire for the fumigation (*bsangs*) is lit. Two horses have been prepared with their best saddles and ornaments: a white mule for *lha mo*, a black stallion with a star mark on the face and on the right leg for Mgon po.[20] Offerings of alcohol are made before them to request the deities to come and ride them. The warriors position themselves in two rows perpendicular to the temple and are surrounded by the villagers. The sacristan, in the middle, first purifies the ground. Then he conducts a ceremony dedicated to Mgon po, centred around the large *gtor ma* decorated with *tsakali*, which is the Mgon po *dbang gtor*. A libation (*gser skyems*) is offered and then a ceremonial offering of alcohol and a prayer empower the flag by the deity (*mar chang*). The *mar chang* is intended to please the protective deities in general and Mgon po in particular, so that people "have peace and good harvest, increased productivity of grain and healthy cattle, and every other auspicious accomplishment. May all wishes be fulfilled".[21] Finally, the *dbang gtor* is taken out of the courtyard by the sacristan and thrown out of the manor. This ceremony is therefore an offering to the deity who then gives his blessing and empowerment to the warriors.

It is followed immediately by the procession around the temple. This is called *rten gso*, "renewing the support", which implies that it is intended to restore the link with Mgon po for another year. The procession follows this order: lay musicians with double-faced cylindrical drums and a gong, the two horses, the warriors, the yaks and then all the other animals led or carried by the people, then the rest of the villagers, especially those who had babies born that year so that they get blessings from the deities. There are three rounds of the temple and each time the horses and warriors reach the front of the temple, everybody shouts. Until the 1980s, the warriors used to fire matchlocks, small canons, and guns into the air but this is no longer done nowadays, apparently because the gun powder or bullets are no longer available!

[20] There is also a ram for Dam can Rdo rje legs pa.

[21] *Sgrig lam rnam gzhag lag len* (1999: 159).

As soon as the procession is over, the warriors resume the same position in two lines and the villagers sit and watch. The general performs a very solemn dance (Plate. 5),[22] the steps of which are associated with subjugation or war. He jumps while brandishing his sword and uttering a song that invokes Mgon po. Suddenly, he runs out of the courtyard waving his sword. Then he comes back very calm, and bows down to the temple where Mgon po resides. At the end of this ritual dance his attendant cleans the sword blade on his sleeve before helping him to put it back in the scabbard. Although he is not in a trance, the general himself believes that Mgon po has come and helped him vanquish the enemies, which is quite obvious from the gesture of cleaning the blade when he comes back from outside the manor.

Two lay-practitioners on the roof announce the end of the whole sequence with their long trumpets. It is now time for everybody to go up inside the temple and participate in the last part of the ceremony, which has been described earlier.

The Ritual as Social Revealer and Identity Marker

Beyond the description of the *bskang gso* ritual, I would now like to make some comments that may help in the understanding of the significance of the ritual. The timing of the *bkang gso* in the agricultural year, after the harvest and at the time the cattle migrate to the sub-tropical pastures before the onset of winter, points, of course, to a kind of thanksgiving ceremony. This type of ritual is found all over the Tibetan world under different names.[23] However, if some of the sequences that have been described here are familiar to many scholars of the Tibetan world, their combination is unique to O rgyan chos gling, as each local ritual is unique in the sense that it is dependent on a convergence of local factors. This convergence creates the ritual's specificity in a certain context and becomes a kind of identity marker for the ritual.

In O rgyan chos gling, the ritual is neither a monastic ritual nor a domestic one, but presents characteristics of both. Although sponsored mostly by the *chos rje* family, the ritual is not only for the family's well-

[22] This dance is classified as a *'bod 'cham* in Bhutan, that is a dance by laymen but with a religious meaning.

[23] See Balikci 2002 : 14, who mentions a *bskang gso* ceremony performed among the Lhopo of Sikkim after the harvest.

being but also for that of the villagers, the focal point being the propitiation of the protective deity Mgon po. One may argue that the villagers used to be dependent on the family and therefore it was beneficial for the family in the context of a feudal set-up. Plus, today the villagers contribute to the food for the lay-practitioners on the second day. However, it is also true that nowadays no economic reason obliges the family to continue to hold such a grand and expensive ritual. One has to go deeper into the socio-religious organisation and history of the valley to find the explanation.

When the flag is taken down and hoisted up, each family of the village sends at least one representative. There is an old belief that holding the ropes of the *lha dar* cleanses of all the negative influences of the year. The villagers are grouped according to their ancient social status. Thus the women who are on the roof were the servants of the *chos rje* family, and those who are in the pasture were weavers and close servants of the ladies of the *chos rje* family (Bumthangkha: **thagma* and **armo*). They belonged to the 'drap' (*grwa pa*) category which meant their work for the estate was a tax but they owned their land and house. Those in the courtyard belonged to the 'zap' (*bza' pa*) category of serfs.[24] They owned nothing, came in the morning to get their food for their three meals and then went to work on the estate. The men, who also belonged to these two social categories, were stable boys (*a drung*), cattle and pig herders, water carriers and close servants of the male members of the *chos rje* family.

Although today nobody is obliged to come to the flag ritual and no mention is made of the previous social status, each family nevertheless makes a point of sending a representative, male or female, who automatically knows where he/she should stand. Therefore this ritual goes beyond the socio-economic obligation that I described earlier and to which it could be reduced—for example, in a Marxist perspective. It also demonstrates the strength of belief in the subtle territorial link

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[24] (1) The etymology of *'drap', as it was explained to me, is simply *grwa pa*, 'monk', which seems strange, but as most of these 'drap' were hereditary workers tied to the *chos rje* of central Bhutan, then it is perhaps not so surprising that they were termed 'monks', even though they were ordinary laymen. The form *grwa pa* is contracted in Dzongkha, as usual, to a single syllable *grwap*.

(2) The word *'zap' is perhaps easier to explain. I was told the etymology is *bza' pa*, that is 'one who eats [the master's food]'. See also Kunzang Choden's article.

Could both categories be considered 'serfs' in Western terminology? This is an issue that I will not deal with here.

between the villagers, the *chos rje* family and the deity, which has survived through major socio-economic changes.

This community awareness in the importance of the ritual for its well-being as well as the renewal of allegiances can also be understood through other events than the main ceremony. For example, after the dinner on the last day, the lay-practitioners come up to the kitchen of the *chos rje* family and perform a dance while singing a song to the glory of Rdo rje gling pa and his lineage. This ceremony is called the *Bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan* and the song, the *O rgyan chos gling chos brgyud gdung brgyud gzhas*.[25] All are offered alcohol and snacks.

Also, at the beginning of the fieldwork on the ritual in the 1990s, I was quite surprised to note that this *bskang gso* ritual was not attended by people from other villages in the Stang valley. I was used to the festivals in the *dzong*s where everybody comes from all over the valley, but in the Stang valley, even though people knew about the *bskang gso*, they did not come to attend. I then realised that people did not consider this festival as one that could be watched or briefly attended. It was a festival in which one must participate because it concerned them. For the other villages in the valley, even if they had economic links with O rgyan chos gling in the past, today they would not consider themselves part of its territory and would consider the *bskang gso* as a private function.

After enquiring into which villages around O rgyan chos gling participate, I found out that although some villages were very close, their inhabitants were not present at the ritual and only two villages considered themselves as the same territory and people (*yul gcig, mi gcig*) as O rgyan chos gling: *Gamling, half an hour's walk down the hill on the western side, and *Binzibi and its annex *Shobrang, one and a half hours to the north. I had no time to research the exact ties of these two villages to O rgyan chos gling but they appear to have been populated by people coming from O rgyan chos gling.

A small incident recently reinforced this hypothesis: outsiders offered gifts to O rgyan chos gling villagers but forgot—simply because they did not know—the other villagers, who were furious and complained they too 'belonged' to O rgyan chos gling.

If the ritual reveals the ancient structure with a stratified society based on residence, it also casts light on the territorial divisions of the

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[25] This dance is very similar to the dance called *chos gzhas*, performed at the *'Brug pa tshes bcu* to the glory of the Zhabs drung and the 'Brug pa.

Stang valley, since villagers considered themselves as direct dependencies of O rgyan chos gling. As the name *bskang gso* indicates, the ritual is an occasion to renew the alliance and the allegiance between the villagers, the *chos rje* family and the main deity with his retinue of lesser deities. It operates on two complementary planes: the deities to which the ritual is dedicated are a link between the *chos rje* family and the villagers and it is the ritual to these common deities that reveals the social coherence and the identity of the territory. As in a household ritual, it provides, through the list of deities worshipped, information on the migrations and alliances of the *chos rje* family; as in a community ritual, it gives the blessings of the same deities to all the households. The prosperity of the *chos rje* household is a guarantee of the prosperity of the villagers. It is interesting to note that in the 1970s when the household was going through difficult times, the villagers did not want to come for the *bskang gso*, as if these difficult times could be interpreted as a sign of anger on the part of Mgon po and the other deities and the villagers were afraid of bringing this anger upon themselves.

Conclusion

Finally, this study raises the question of the legitimacy of the *chos rje* household to wield power or influence. Economic, religious and political powers were all held together in the same hands in the context of the ancient society as the ritual clearly demonstrates. These powers were given to an 'elected' family by the deity because he was pleased. The moment the deity was not pleased—and often it was not because of the behaviour of one member of the household—he withdrew his protection and calamities fell upon the family and, by extension, on the villagers.

In this context, Mgon po really plays the role of a local deity and the good fortune (*g.yang*) of the family is linked to him. It is from this privileged link to the deity, brought by Rdo rje gling pa, the ancestor of the lineage, that the O rgyan chos gling family has legitimacy as *chos rje* to this day and therefore has the right as well as the duty to carry out the ritual. The importance of a privileged link to a deity, whatever name it may take and in either a Buddhist or non-Buddhist context, has always been a source of the legitimacy of power in the Tibetan world.[26] One of

[26] For example, see Karmay and Sagant 1998 and Walsh 1906.

the reasons for the fall of the Tibetan royal dynasty was that the kings no longer believed in the principles that were the sources of their power and legitimacy. The proper execution of appropriate rituals is paramount to the upholding of this link or contract between the two parties.

The ritual reveals the layers of tightly knit relations between religion, politics and the economy in a community of central Bhutan. As in many parts of the Tibetan world, the ritual is important for the identity of the territory and the renewal of allegiances between the protective deity and the *chos rje* family, and between this family and the villagers. It is a thread back to the founder of the lineage and a stamp of authentication for the family, a covenant of well-being for the villagers and it gives to all the feeling of belonging to the same territory, protected by Mgon po Ma ning.

O rgyan chos gling is, to the best of my knowledge, one of the few estates, if not the only one, in the Tibetan and Himalayan world that has survived as the property of the same religious and noble family for five centuries. It has produced statesmen as well as reincarnated lamas, and has adapted to the socio-agrarian reforms of the 1950s in Bhutan and to the development policies of the government. At the same time, it maintains that which produces or provides its cohesion, what we could call its essence, the ritual that is the interface between the different aspects of this small society.

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Plate 1: O rgyan chos gling Manor and central tower in Stang Valley, Bumthang



Plate 2: Erecting the Prayer Flag during the Autumn *Bskang gso* at O rgyan chos gling



Plate 3: Altar in the main temple (Jo khang) at O rgyan chos gling, with *Gtor ma* offerings.



Plate 4: Leading yaks for the procession during *Bskang gso* festival at O rgyan chos gling



Plate 5: Dance of the *Dmag dpon* during *Bskang gso*, O rgyan chos gling

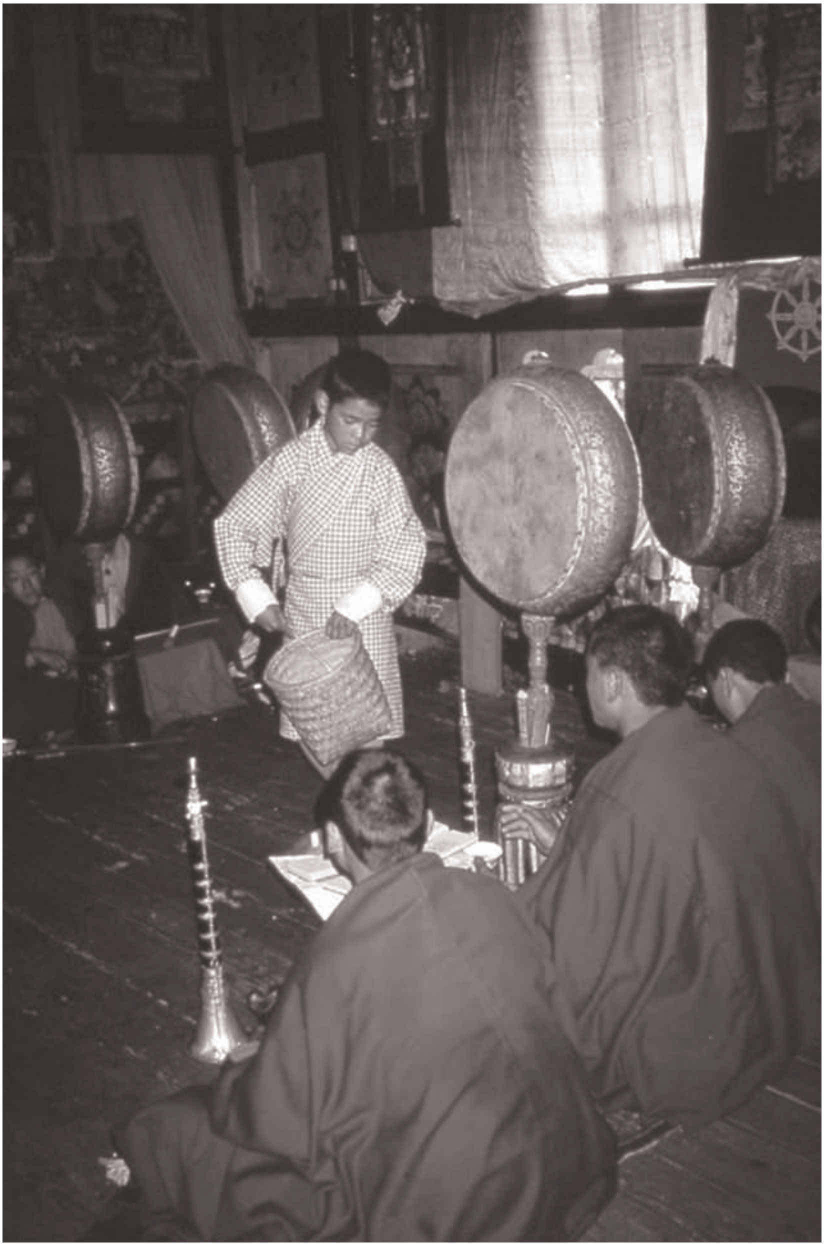


Plate 6: Serving food to the lay-practitioners (*Sgom chen*) during Bskang gso, O rgyan chos gling

CHANGING THE CONTOURS OF THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE: THE *JABMI* ACT 2003

Richard W. Whitecross[1]

> Justice being the primary source of peace…and reaffirming the noble goal in pursuit of justice and recognising the importance of the assistance of *Jabmi* to protect and establish rights in all stages of proceedings, we hereby, amend and consolidate the Law relating to *Jabmi*s and law societies established in respect of the profession of legal practitioners of Bhutan and to provide for matters connected therewith.
>
> (*Jabmi* Act 2003: Preamble)

As part of the wider process of modernisation and transformation of Bhutan, the creation and establishment of an independent judiciary marks one of the principal achievements of the Bhutanese government. However, as Simoni notes, "some components of the legal system have started to move very fast from the model of the 'rule of traditional law' toward that of the 'rule of professional law'".[2] As the sources of law and regulations increase in Bhutan, notably the volume and complexity of national legislation, there has been an increasing need for the emergence of a professional category of legal actor outside the formal court system developed in the second half of the twentieth century.[3]

Accordingly, I examine the role of *jabmi*[4] and the professionalisation of this important category of legal actor. I outline the main features of the *Jabmi* Act 2003 and examine the implications of the changing contours of the Bhutanese legal landscape. I argue that the *Jabmi* Act 2003

[1] University of Edinburgh, and an Associate Member of UMR 7133 CNRS/EPHE (Paris). Thanks to those who commented and raised various important questions during and after the presentation. The paper is based on a close reading of the text and research conducted in Bhutan, June–September 2003, funded by the Society for South Asian Studies and the Frederick Williamson Memorial Trust (Cambridge).

[2] Simoni 2004: 246. I wish to thank Professor Simoni for making his draft available to me.

[3] See Whitecross 2004.

[4] *Rgyab mi*: surety, guarantor, advocate, attorney. Please note all terms are Dzongkha and I use the Roman Dzongkha transcription throughout the main text. The transliteration is in the notes.

marks the transition from a traditional category of representative without formal legal training to a professional category, entry to which is based on established criteria. The *Jabmi Tshogdey*[5] and *Jabmi Thuentshog*[6] created by the Act will control entrance to and the conduct of the profession of *jabmi*, which I argue will be under pressure to gain wider, formal legal education to be able to appear on a par with the formally trained young lawyers and to create and maintain the confidence of the public.

Background

References to *jabmi* can be found as early as the seventeenth century suggesting that this function has a well established history in Bhutanese legal practice.[7] In contrast to *barmi* who act as mediators, *jabmi* appear to share the same features as *ngotsap* who act as legal representatives.[8] *Jabmi* are similar to *barmi* in that they possess knowledge of the law. However, there is a subtle, yet important, difference between *barmi* and *jabmi*—although both these roles can be played by the same individual, they represent two different approaches. The first, *barmi,* is based on the assumption that the *barmi* will act neutrally in negotiating a mediated settlement between the parties, whereas the *jabmi* acts specifically for a client. At present, there is no formal requirement to have a *jabmi* to represent a client in court and legal representation is done either by the individual him/herself, a friend or relative acting as a *ngotsap* or by a *jabmi*.

Education and Licensing: Regulating *Jabmi*

Until the early 1990s, the *jabmi* received no formal legal education. From discussions it is clear that *jabmi* were literate to some degree and gained their practical knowledge of laws and customs through experi-

[5] *Rgyab mi tshogs sde*: Jabmi Committee/Council.

[6] *Rgyab mi mthun tshogs*: Jabmi Society/Association.

[7] Royal High Court of Justice 2003. The historical development of *jabmi* will be examined in a larger project to be undertaken tracing the history of Bhutanese jurisprudence from the thirteenth century.

[8] *Ngo tshab*: agent, acting person. *Bar mi*: mediator, middle man.

ence rather than formal training, perhaps through their role as a village elder or headman. This perceived knowledge of the laws is the main feature, and certainly one that caused comment among older Bhutanese I spoke with. One elderly man from Lhuntse district noted ruefully, "how could I tell if they know or not? They speak with confidence…but now the judges know the law; their [the *jabmi*] ignorance can be seen". However, in 1996, following criticisms from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention over the perceived weakness of the *jabmi* system, formal training for *jabmi* was introduced.[9] This move towards providing formal legal training through a series of workshops in part reflects the impact of another innovation introduced by the High Court.

In 1992, a National Legal Course was introduced to train young Bhutanese in law, and this innovation was drawn upon to devise a system of training for *jabmi*. The first training course was held in March 1996 and senior judges and representatives from other branches of government, as well as the private sector, took part. The course focussed on providing a brief outline of the basic laws, the function and structure of the judiciary and legal process. A major innovation was the discussion of the relationship between *jabm*i and client, the first apparent official move towards establishing codes of conduct governing *jabmi*.[10]

According to the most recent available figures, there are 166 licensed *jabmi* working in Bhutan (UN Core Doc. 1999: 4). During my first visit to Thimphu in 2000, I came across a sign 'City Legal Unit', the first private law office opened in Bhutan, and established by a former *thrimrab*.[11] A few other private law offices have opened in Thimphu and Phuentsholing. It appears that many Bhutanese believed that the role of the *jabmi* was confined to civil cases. However, the right to call on a *jabmi* to represent an accused in a criminal case was always available, if not especially well known. Section 32 of the Civil and Criminal Procedure Code 2001 states that an individual can plead or defend him/herself, or be represented by a *jabmi*. This right of legal representation can be waived if the individual is deemed mentally competent. Finally, legal representation will be provided in such cases as deemed necessary in the interests of justice at no cost to the individual.[12]

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[9] Hainzl 1997: 36.

[10] *Kuensel*, "*Jabmi*s completed training" 26th March 1996.

[11] *Khrims rabs*: judicial assistant.

[12] Civil and Criminal Procedure Code 2001: 10.

As the number of Bhutanese students studying law either in Delhi or Mumbai increases, and the teaching of law and legal studies in Bhutan itself is enhanced, the question of equal access to legal representation arises. This will not only impact on the organisation of the national legal system, but on the options available to ordinary Bhutanese. Currently, legal representation is not provided by licensed lawyers in the sense of individuals holding university law degrees and admitted to a national law society or bar association.[13] However, a choice between formally trained lawyers, and the licensed *jabmi* who have been a feature of Bhutanese legal practice since at least the seventeenth century, may soon appear in Thimphu and Phuentsholing. A potential tension could arise between those able to afford private, legally trained representatives, and those who are unable to do so and therefore must call on the services of the licensed *jabmi*. A second, equally important issue, as yet unresolved, is the potential loss of the knowledge and practical skills possessed by *jabmi*. Nor should the social role of the *jabmi*, especially in the rural communities, be either overlooked or underestimated in the process of modernising the legal system.

Formal legal education has been described as producing "enormous and sometimes wrenching changes in how an individual sees and understands the world around them".[14] The rapid changes, especially in legal education and the formal training of both the junior and senior members of the judiciary will have an impact not only on the provision of legal services, but on the way in which laws are formulated, interpreted and applied. Even within the judiciary and the police force, there has been an emphasis on training. National Judicial Conferences have been held since 1976, allowing for increased consistency in the interpretation and application of both existing and new legislation. Beyond the National Judicial Conference, as one can read in *Kuensel*, additional training courses are organised to promote a greater understanding and an "effective judicial process".[15] In one such course, the participants included 8 judges, 15 lawyers (educated in India and elsewhere) and 10 police officers. Focusing for the main part on criminal proce-

[13] However, as I go on to discuss in the paper, the *Jabmi* Act 2003 does establish a form of law society. It will be interesting to watch its evolution, especially as and when *jabmi* either privately or through necessity start to formally study for law degrees, or young lawyers seek admission to the roll of *jabmi* discussed later in the paper.

[14] Economides 1994: xxiii.

[15] "Effective Judicial Process" (*Kuensel*, 29th April 2000: 6).

dure, they were addressed by the Chief Justice on the registration of cases, the use of witnesses and preliminary hearings whilst seeking to promote co-ordination between the police and judiciary. A US criminal attorney speaking at the course outlined "fundamental rights of the accused, *the defendant's right to counsel*, unreasonable search and seizure".[16] This emphasis on training and formal education sets out the background to the *Jabmi* Act 2003 which is discussed in detail below.

Jabmi Act 2003: the Framework

In the 79th Session of the National Assembly in 2001, concerns were raised by the representatives about the unregulated fees being charged by *jabmi*. A resolution was passed by the National Assembly that the judiciary should draft a bill to regulate the professional conduct of *jabmi*. During the 81st Session of the National Assembly in 2003, the draft bill was placed before the National Assembly representatives for their consideration.

As mentioned in the introduction, the *Jabmi* Act is one of a series of major reforms introduced by the Royal Court of Justice in recent years. These reforms have sought to remedy deficiencies by making law faster, and promoting greater transparency in the judicial process thereby enhancing popular confidence in the legal institutions and personnel. One example of this is the Code of Civil and Criminal Procedure 2001 which regulates court procedure. A second example was a training course entitled "Training and Dissemination on Rule of Law and Judicial Process" launched in the autumn 2001 by the Royal Court of Justice in the districts.[17]

The *Jabmi* Act 2003 is made up of 71 sections set out in nine chapters covering the establishment of the *Jabmi Tshogdey* and *Jabmi Thuentshog*, the enrolment of *jabmi,* rights and privileges and duties of *jabmi*, fees and disciplinary matters. The contents of the *Jabmi* Act are significant, not only for the formalisation of *jabmi* as a professional

16 *Ibid*., emphasis added.

17 The twenty districts (*rdzong khag*) were divided into three zones and a different High Court Judge attended the courses in each zone. The Chief Justice personally supervised the courses in the eastern *dzongkhags*. The final presentation of this course was held in Wangdiphodrang, 5th–7th August 2002, under the supervision of the Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye.

body, but the establishment of a bar association with fixed criteria for admission. The development of National Legal Course (1992) and the introduction of legal courses aimed at *jabmi* (1996) signalled that the traditional nature of their role, based on social position and respect for their knowledge and wisdom was in the process of being altered. The *Jabmi* Act 2003, I believe, creates the basis for a far reaching transformation of the Bhutanese legal landscape.

The Institutions and Admission

The main chapter of the *Jabmi* Act 2003 details the establishment and function of the *Jabmi Tshogdey* and *Jabmi Thuentshog*. The main professional committee regulating *jabmi* will be the *Jabmi Tshogdey*. The committee will be composed of the Attorney General of Bhutan, two retired judges from the High Court/Supreme Court nominated by the National Judicial Commission,[18] the president of the *Jabmi Thuentshog*, the Chairperson of each disciplinary committee and three members elected from amongst the *jabmi*. The non-ex-officio members will sit on the committee for a maximum three year term.

Section 9 outlines the functions of the *Jabmi Tshogdey*. The main emphasis is on promoting justice and working with the formal court system to ensure "just, fair and prompt dispensation of justice".[19] To this end, the Act emphasises the conduct of *jabmi* and underscores the importance of professional standards of conduct. Under the general powers of the *Jabmi Tshogdey*, two of the four powers relate specifically to the examination rules for selection and standards of professional conduct required.

The creation of a *Jabmi Thuentshog*, or a '*jabmi* society', to which all *jabmi* will and must belong represents the concretisation of a process started in the early 1990s to transform the *jabmi* from non-formal legal actors into formal legal actors, with official recognition. This may prove to be important for the further transformation of the status of *jabmi* in the future.

Chapter 3 of the *Jabmi* Act sets out the criteria for the eligibility for admission to the roll of *jabmi*, which will be prepared and maintained by the *Jabmi Tshogdey*. Section 23 states:

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[18] The National Judicial Commission was established in September 2003.

[19] Section 9, *Jabmi* Act 2003.

> A person to be admitted as a *Jabmi* shall:
> a) be a Bhutanese citizen;
> b) be a person of integrity, good character and reputation;
> c) be a person not addicted to drugs;
> d) not be a person of unsound mind or of mental infirmity;
> e) not be a person, who is adjudged bankrupt;
> f) not have been sentenced for criminal offences;
> g) have legal qualification recognised by the *Jabmi Tshogdey* of Bhutan;
> h) have undergone the National Legal Course; and
> i) have passed the Bar selection examinations.

Provided that an individual possesses the requisite qualifications and is not barred by subsections (c)-(f), the *Jabmi Tshogdey* can enrol the applicant on the roll of *jabmi*. However, there is one exception not covered in section 23—former judges are specifically prohibited, as is commonly found in other jurisdictions, from appearing in court as a *jabmi*. This prohibition was the source of confusion among the Bhutanese with whom I spoke, and also was raised during the National Assembly debate. Whilst some Bhutanese felt that former judges were ideally suited to being admitted as *jabmi*, in common with other legal systems, it was argued that it would be inappropriate for former judges to appear in court or act as *jabmi*.

Before leaving the provisions for admission, I want to briefly draw attention to the oath to be taken by the new *jabmi*. The oath administered on admission to the *jabmi* roll states:

> I…in the name of the Triple Gems and the guardian deities of the Kingdom of Bhutan do solemnly swear and affirm that I will preserve, protect and defend the law of Bhutan, and that I will conduct myself, as a *Jabmi* uprightly and according to the laws of the Kingdom of Bhutan.[20]

It is worth noticing that the oath specifically focuses on the role of law, and indirectly equates the temporal laws with the spiritual laws of Buddha. This is a small, yet important, underscoring of the importance of Buddhism as the foundation on which modern Bhutanese jurisprudence draws its inspiration and cultural values. There is one further aspect worth noting—the oath does not refer to the legislative and executive arms of the Bhutanese state. It appears therefore that the drafters intentionally sought to simultaneously place notions of law and justice above temporal politics whilst separating the judiciary and all its personnel from the other branches of government. This separation of the

[20] *Ibid*.: sect. 25.

judiciary and the *jabmi*, I believe, reflects a strong desire to ensure that the rule of law is strengthened and that the personnel of the law (judges and *jabmi* alike) are free from outside pressures or influences.

The *Jabmi Tshogdey* may in certain circumstances remove the name of a *jabmi* from the official roll. In general, if a *jabmi* knowingly makes false statements when seeking admission to the roll of *jabmi*, engages in gross professional misconduct or is subsequently convicted of a criminal offence the *Jabmi Tshogdey* may, at the discretion of the committee, remove the *jabmi*'s name from the roll.

Rights and Duties

Licensed *jabmi*s are specifically granted certain rights and privileges. These include the right to practise before any court in Bhutan without restriction of access, as well as before all boards, tribunals and so forth. *Jabmi* enjoy civil and criminal immunity for all statements made by them in good faith in both written and oral pleadings, before or to any court or tribunal. Importantly, there is the specific recognition of client-lawyer privilege. Section 33 specifically states that "all organisations" must recognise and respect that all communications between *jabmi* and client are confidential.

The second longest chapter in the *Jabmi* Act sets out at length the duties and responsibilities of *jabmi*. Their general duties and responsibilities extend to fifteen general requirements, a further twelve to their clients, six to their opponent in a case and a further thirteen owed to the court. In essence, *jabmi* are to act in their client's best interest subject to maintaining due observance of the law and the principles of good professional conduct.

Section 35 (j) states "[*jabmi* shall] seek to uphold legal rights at all times freely and diligently in accordance with the law and recognise standards of legal profession". In terms of their duties towards the Court there is a strong emphasis on the importance of maintaining a courteous, professional demeanour both in court and in any private meetings with the judges. These sections are particularly noteworthy for the use of terms such as 'practitioner' which, arguably, implies a more continuous engagement in legal affairs than the traditional *jabmi* conveyed. The other term is the reference to 'legal profession'. Are we seeing the willing into existence of a professional legal category? The

Jabmi Act 2003 is, I believe, providing a new vocabulary for describing the Bhutanese legal world, and one which will shape the meanings and practices associated with it.

Fees—a Reasonable Fee?

The *Jabmi* Act originated from concerns expressed in the National Assembly over the level of fees charged by *jabmi*. Concerns were voiced by *chimi* that the level of fees being charged by *jabmi* were placing them beyond the means of rural communities.[21] A growing feature of contemporary Bhutanese life is the perceived differences in income levels between the village communities and the urban dwellers. These differences, real and otherwise, are reflected in people's discussions and opinions, and indeed in how many ordinary Bhutanese described the options available to them in the event of a dispute. Many I interviewed preferred to call on a relative (acting in the capacity of *ngotsap*) to represent them in court than resort to a *jabmi* for fear of the cost and doubts over the relative skills of *jabmi* to present their cases to the court. Chapter 6 of the *Jabmi* Act is, however, a short chapter, despite the widespread concerns over fees. It provides that *jabmi* may charge a reasonable fee for work undertaken, though the term 'reasonable' is not defined. Rather, as explained by the Chief Justice to the National Assembly during the debate on the draft Act, it was felt that fees could not be fixed. It was felt that to fix fees would have a negative impact.

The Chief Justice described the term 'reasonable' as implying 'affordable'. In settling on the fee in advance, he stressed that the *jabmi* must take into account the nature of the case and agree on the amount before engaging in the case. Importantly, the agreed fee is to be recorded in a legal agreement between the *jabmi* and client. By recording the fee in a formal agreement the parties are establishing their respective rights and duties to each other. As in other jurisdictions, the *jabmi* may retain possession of documents or papers relating to the case until the fee is settled.

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[21] *Spyi mi*: elected member of the Bhutanese National Assembly.

Discipline and Punishment

Chapters 7 and 8 deal specifically with professional disciplinary matters and punishment by the Disciplinary Committees, established by the *Jabmi Tshogdey,* of *jabmi* who are found in breach of their duties and responsibilities. There is a clear concern that the *jabmi* realise the importance of maintaining a professional discipline. This underlines a major shift in how the role and category of *jabmi* are to be conceived. It is directly linked with the establishment of the *jabmi* and the control over admission to the *jabmi* roll. Of course, one could argue that the concern about discipline reflects in-built cultural factors associated with the code of conduct called *driglam namzha*.[22] *Driglam namzha* will, in my opinion, continue to define and shape the discipline and conduct of the *jabmi* when in court and interacting with court personnel and their opponents. However, we can also trace here the influence of Western legal training and exposure to other legal systems. A comparison between the list of duties and responsibilities owed by the *jabmi*, discussed above, with a similar document from the Law Society of Scotland, for example, quickly reveals the broader similarities and standards which are implicit in a 'profession'.[23]

Each aspect of the *Jabmi* Act therefore can be seen as enhancing the traditional role of the *jabmi*, and in the process transforming *jabmi* from 'respected' members of the community into members of a professional body to which they are accountable. The emphasis on knowledge and acquiring the pre-requisite qualifications for admission to the roll stresses the professional minimum required by contemporary *jabmi* to supply a professional service to their clients.

Accountability in recent years has played a prominent role in the ongoing political transformation of Bhutan, and it is therefore not surprising to find that *jabmi* are being made accountable. Underlying this process of accountability is a wider issue and one which is central to the process of political and legal transformation and reform—legitimacy. If *jabmi*, or any other professional actor are not held accountable for their actions or behaviour, it will be very difficult to engender public confidence in the emerging legal system. This is crucial and it has been a major background feature of the recent initiatives by the Royal Court

[22] *Sgrig lam rnam gzhag.*

[23] Code of Conduct of Solicitors and various Acts governing the conduct of the profession in Scotland parallel the *Jabmi* Act 2003.

of Justice. By being transformed into a profession, if perhaps still in an embryonic form, *jabmi* must seek to fulfil certain standards of conduct to establish the essential relationship of trust between lawyer and client, lawyer and court, and between lawyer and other members of the legal profession.

Conclusion: the Emergence of a Professional Law?

In this brief paper, I have intentionally turned attention away from the processes of law enactment and implementation. Rather, I want to illustrate the importance of a broader focus on the range of actors, legal and non-legal, and to raise certain questions about the impact of the ongoing professionalisation of a traditional, non-formal category of actor on both the legal and social landscapes of Bhutan.

The Bhutanese legal system has evolved rapidly, especially since the early 1990s. In Scotland for example, where the oldest legal association in the world is found, it was not until 1873 that the requirements for admission as a solicitor were settled.[24] The General Council of Solicitors was not formed until 1933 to control entrance to and the conduct of the profession of solicitor. Bearing this in mind, we can see that the Bhutanese judiciary and the emerging wider legal profession have developed very rapidly.

Speaking with the Bhutanese about their experiences of *jabmi*, many expressed concern over the lack of accountability and the level of fees demanded. The *Jabmi* Act 2003 and the subsequent establishment of the *Jabmi Tshogdey* address the first of these concerns. However, it will take time for popular confidence in the *Jabmi Tshogdey* to develop as people gradually come to understand its function. Equally important for the *Jabmi Tshogdey* will be to be seen to act impartially. In other words, those networks of connections between *jabmi* and other legal actors must be seen as open and transparent. This feature remains one of the hardest one to address – during a recent visit to Bhutan one woman describing her experiences in a land dispute openly suggested that the judge in her case was being manipulated by her opponents and their *jabmi*.

In an interview to *Kuensel*, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, the Chief Justice, noted that the Act sought to “build a professional group of peo-

[24] Writers to Her Majesty's Signet, founded in 1594.

ple whose values will be anchored in the past, render service to the present generation, and be responsible to the future".[25] The rapid professionalisation of *jabmi* during the 1990s has transformed this category of legal actor from a category of persons "respected in their communities for their wisdom, experience and articulate speech" into a "profession formalised by the government". Yet, whilst certain formal prerequisites are now necessary for admission to the *jabmi* list, it is clear that in the longer term *jabmi* will be further transformed as an increased emphasis on longer, formal legal education is introduced as a requirement for admission. The Chief Justice confirms this view when he notes:

> ...in future, they will have to be lawyers and they will have to undergo the national legal course…we look to the future where our *jabmi*s will be qualified both in international law studies and in our Bhutanese law and literature.[26]

As Merry notes, "new legal institutions and regulations can piggyback onto other economic and political shifts to facilitate change".[27] Various studies have shown how individuals carrying knowledge and expertise from one site to another affect the sorts of law that develop, and furthermore, the social transformation which can follow. Perhaps, if as suggested *jabmi* will in the future also be required to possess a law degree, they will begin to influence the way in which laws are applied in Bhutan. This is, I think, a major reason why there is a growing need for legal education beyond the existing national legal course to be provided in Bhutan. One final comment, as *jabmi* become increasingly professional, they will become more socialised in the vocabulary and narratives of the courts. Rather than the current ability to express a client's case in elegant Dzongkha, the style and form of presentations and arguments will be refined. In other words, moving beyond the everyday understanding of law found in popular culture, expressed over meals with family and friends, to using the vocabulary of the courts and structuring the narratives presented increasingly based on a professional, rather than lay, understanding of the law and its operation.

[25] *Kuensel* 9th, "National Assembly endorses the *Jabmi* Act" August 2003: 20.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Merry 2003: 579.

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